

When Words Alone do not Suffice

Visual and Textual Testimony in the Comics Medium

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Visual and Textual Testimony in the Comics
Medium

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IV

Abstract

The main focus of this thesis is to discuss how testimony is communicated in the three graphic narratives of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel and *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman and David Polonsky. Furthermore, I aim to show how the comics medium is, due to its interdisciplinary nature, particularly suited for communicating testimony. The chapters will focus on the relationship between the graphical and the textual aspects of the narratives, and how this interaction steers the reader's understanding of the graphic memoirs. The relationship between text and image is a natural part of the comics medium, this, in turn, gives witnesses of trauma a unique outlet for voicing what been experienced. Testimonies presented in artistic mediums are normally given in a mono-modal manner. The exploration of testimony in bi-modal expressive forms seems particularly interesting, both in relations to how the artist expresses him or herself, and how the reader understands this. The three chapters are structured around a few aspects of each of the narratives that I claim are the chief factors used by the artist(s) in order to be able to give their testimonials. Terms such as "postmemory", "closure" and "collaborative testimony" will, consequently, be explored in-depth.

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Oslo, May 2012.

Helge Engeseth Kleivane

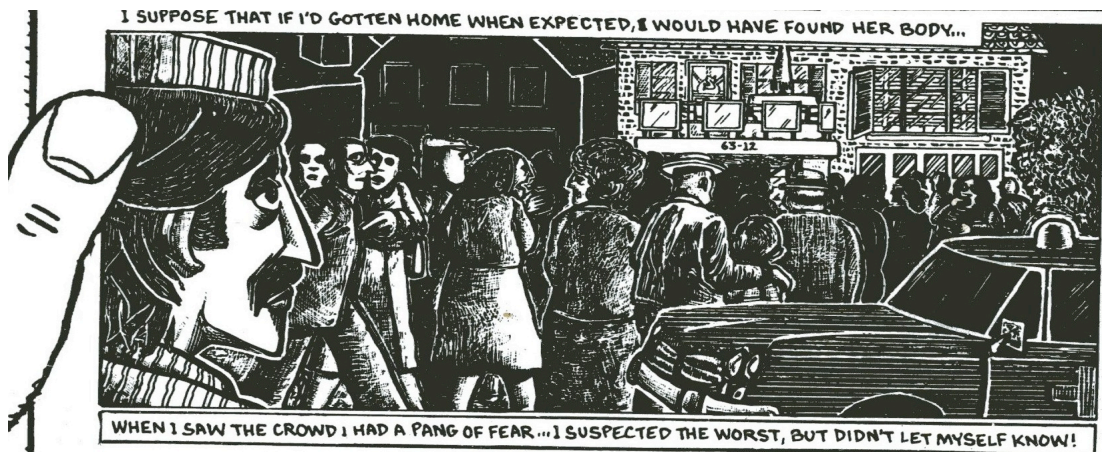
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Introduction

“Witnessing always implies a relationship; I tell myself stories all the time, but I cannot testify to myself alone. Part of what turns stories into testimony is the call made upon another person to receive that testimony.”¹

Arthur Frank’s words from *The Wounded Storyteller* have resonated in me time and time again as I have read different graphic memoirs. One particular issue that has reverberated strongly in me is how hands are often represented in graphic narratives that deal with trauma, memory and the act of giving testimony, particularly when the hand is holding an object, such as a photograph, a diary or a written/drawn account of the past. The hand holding the object is clearly a reference to the artist/author, however, it is also an extension of the reader’s own hand, as it resembles the reader’s hand that is holding the narrative.² This implicates the reader in the narrative and the testimony in a distinctly graphical manner; the reader is literally drawn into the graphic narrative, further extending the role of the reader to that of a listener of testimony. The drawn hand can arguably be claimed to work as a “call upon another person to receive that testimony,”³ a way for the artist to visually ask the reader to receive the narrative as a testimonial.



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, fig. 6, 102.

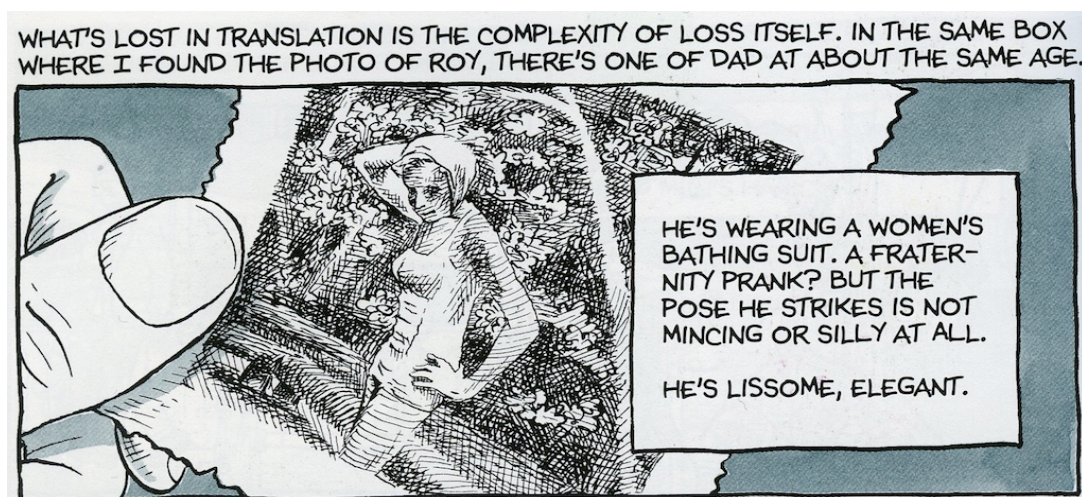
¹ Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 143.

² I owe thanks to my supervisor Rebecca Scherr for making me aware of the idea of “multiple hands” in her essay: “Queering the Family Album: the Re-orientation of Things in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*.”

³ Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, 143.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 2, 34.



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 1, 120.

In this thesis I will be presenting how testimony is communicated in the three graphic memoirs: *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986 and 1992) by Art Spiegelman, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) by Alison Bechdel and *Waltz with Bashir* (2009) by Ari Folman and David Polonsky. Moreover, my aim is to show how the comics medium is, due to its interdisciplinary nature, particularly fitting for communicating testimony. I will be focusing on a few specific aspects of each of the graphic memoirs in question, and show how these aspects are vital for the ways in which the narratives communicate testimony. The relationship between the visual and the textual communication in the narratives will be of particular interest, especially how these elements affect the reader as a listener of the witnesses' telling of testimony.

What these three graphic memoirs have in common is their attempt at communicating and sorting out experiences and moments in their authors' lives that

have escaped and evaded a normal rendering in relation to the creation of memories. The fact that the graphic narratives approach the act of giving testimony very differently allows me to discuss several ways in which testimony can be given in graphic memoirs. This diversity will, in turn, allow me to strengthen the thesis' assertion that graphic narratives are well suited for communicating testimony. I will refer to literature written on the topics of testimony, trauma and memory, not only specifically in relation to what is written about how artists present these topics in their works, but also more generally how these three topics are, in fact, communicated.

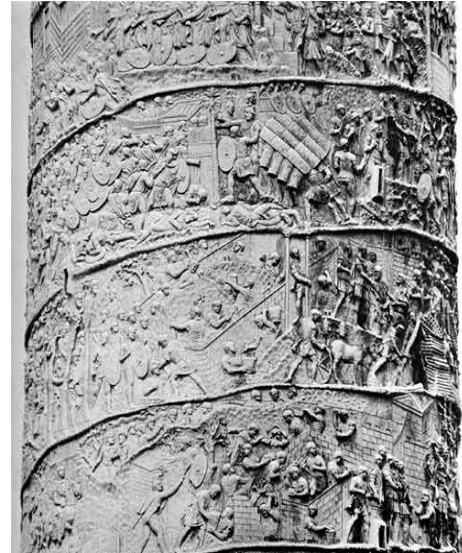
A fairly large corpus of interesting testimonial narratives has developed within the comics medium in recent years, several of which could have been interesting to discuss. Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and *Pedro & Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned* by Judd Winick are some examples of relatively recent autobiographical comics that testify to traumatic and difficult situations in a particular part of the artist's life. My reasons for choosing to discuss *Maus*, *Fun Home* and *Waltz with Bashir* have to do with both their status in the field of graphic narratives and because they all contain communicative tools that are especially interesting in relation to how testimony is given. Although both *Maus* and *Fun Home* have received much critical attention, I have found that there is relatively little written about how *Fun Home* can be seen as testimonial narrative, and moreover, what particular visual and textual techniques the narrative employs in order to communicate testimony.⁴ Despite the fact that more has been written about how testimony is given in *Maus*, in comparison to that of *Fun Home*, the topic is mostly covered in relation to other over-arching subjects. Articles that primarily focus on testimony in *Maus* are few, but there exists some that at least address the issue.⁵ *Waltz with Bashir* is, in terms of critical commentary, a relatively unexplored text, and although there are a few essays written about the film, even less has been done on the graphic narrative that came out in 2009. The process of giving testimony in *Waltz with Bashir* is an especially complex one, and as I will argue, in relation to theory about testimony, the process used to communicate Folman's story is at best unorthodox.

⁴ Although there are a few noteworthy exceptions. See, for example, Ann Cvetkovich's "Drawing the Achieve in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*."

⁵ See: Hillary Chute's "The Shadow of a Past Time": History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*" and Erin McGlothlin's "No Time like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*."

From the Beginning to Where We are Now

One of my main reasons for writing this thesis is to contribute to the elevation of comics as a serious art form. In this regard I see it as necessary to briefly establish some historical notes on the long tradition of sequential narratives, as I believe that people's awareness and regard for the comics medium could be improved if the knowledge of its rich background story was more commonly known. Pictorial narrative sequence has a tradition reaching far beyond the first commercial comic strip, *The Yellow Kid* (1895).⁶ Already in 32 000 BC, cavemen used charcoal and other tools to visually narrate important aspects of their lives into stone walls of caves. The famous Trajan column is another example of graphical presentations that tells different sequential stories. The particular photograph above depicts a small part of Trajan's column, which focuses on Trajan's victory over the Dacian empire in two wars between 101 and 105 AD.⁷ In his first chapter of *Understanding Comics*, McCloud discusses several well-known historical pictorial narratives. One example of this is his presentation of the famous "Bayeux Tapestry", which, in detail and in an unmistakable chronological and sequential way, narrates the story of how England was conquered by Norman forces from 1064 to the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Although, as McCloud points out, there are no panel borders, there is at least a clear distinction of different scenes through the textual (Latin) descriptions of what is going on in the embroidery.



After printing was invented in Europe, sequential narratives became even more widespread; although the visual narratives were mostly used for religious purposes, the works of artists such as William Hogarth are often seen as early examples of the sequential narrative we identify as comics today.⁸ Even closer to the graphic narratives of today is the work by Rodolphe Töpffer, a Swiss artist who lived in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. He created graphic narratives that, as McCloud points out,

⁶ Richard D. Olson, "R. F. Outcault, The Father of the American Sunday Comics, and the Truth About the Creation of the Yellow Kid," accessed March 7, 2012. <http://www.neponset.com/yellowkid/history.htm>.

⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Dacia," accessed March 7, 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/149413/Dacia?anchor=ref24739>.

⁸ See "A Harlot's Progress", published in 1731.

incorporated both the word and the image, using panel borders to segregate different parts.⁹ Up to this point in history, sequential art was expensive to produce and difficult to obtain. It was not until newspapers started printing comic strips that the comics medium received its commercial dimension. When publishers discovered the large interest in comic strips such as *The Yellow Kid*, a huge production and printing of comic books was started. This was the beginning of comics as we know them today, and although it varies greatly from cave paintings and Trajan's column, a presentation of the definition of comics will reveal that the connection between them is unmistakable.

Will Eisner has defined comics as sequential art. This description is explained and elaborated on by Scott McCloud in his now famous work, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. McCloud comes up with a broader definition, characterizing comics as, "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer."¹⁰ The aesthetic response that comics may create in a reader has, interestingly, developed dramatically over the last 50 years. Originally, comics were most often literally what the term comic describes, humoristic stories, sometimes satirical of both fictional and real people. Even today it is still these types of comics (funny or supernatural) that most people immediately associate with the noun comics: superhero tales such as Superman, X-Men, Batman, and Spiderman, or funny comics such as Donald Duck and The Katzenjammer Kids. These mainstream comics are often seen as childish and pubescent in their style, thematics and narrative.¹¹ This common conception has played a big part for people's inherited view that comics are equal to youth literature. The very word comics creates an association to many readers of pertaining to the entire medium, and although the specter of graphic narratives reaches far beyond supernatural and comic graphic narratives, very few people are able to differentiate genre and medium when it comes to comics.¹² Comics is clearly a medium, (similarly to how the novel is a medium), however, as with the novel, comics also has many sub-genres.

In the last five decades there has been a large development in the so-called underground "comix" movement. These graphic narratives developed as a consequence of several aspects of the American society; however, most importantly perhaps was the

⁹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York, HarperPerennial, 1994), 17.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9. McCloud uses italics and bold to mark specific words, unless specifically mentioned, these markings are his, not mine.

¹¹ This is a general observation and does not reflect my own opinion on the subject.

¹² Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), 11.

social movement of political upheaval of the 1960 and 1970's and the more specific movement away from the commercial mainstream comics.¹³ These types of "alternative comics", as Charles Hatfield has labeled them, were able to push the previously set limits of the medium, and explore new ventures in terms of genre and "conventions of serial publication".¹⁴ Many of the experimental projects undertaken in the 1960's, 70s and 80s have been of major importance to the development of sequential art within new genres of comics such as autobiography, memoir, biography and reportage.

Autobiographical comics in particular have, according to Hatfield, been of major importance for the validation of alternative comics:

Autobiography, especially, has been central to alternative comics—whether in picaresque shaggy-dog stories or in disarmingly, sometimes harrowingly, frank uprootings of the psyche—and this has raised knotty questions about truth and fictiveness, realism and fantasy, and the relationship between author and audience.¹⁵

Depictions of the past receive a new dimension of representability in the visual sphere of graphic narratives; graphic memoirs and autobiographies must not only deal with the scrutiny of truthfulness on the basis of the written word, but also in the visual representation of past experiences and historical representation. One example of this is found in Art Spiegelman's newly published *MetaMaus*. In one particular instance he shows and talks about what he researched during one of his visits to Auschwitz. One panel that originates from this research is a panel that shows Vladek hiding out in one of the toilets in the camp; the visual representation of this toilet received attention from a historian who "took me to task in some academic journal for getting the toilets wrong, saying they were just long planks. I was proud of getting it more right than that historian, though, inevitably, I must have been off in some details despite all my research."¹⁶ Spiegelman addresses something vital when he acknowledges that, although he got this right, there is still so much that he probably got wrong. The self-conscious awareness that Spiegelman shows when contemplating his own representations is a feature quite common in graphic memoirs, whether the artist's self-

¹³ Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), ix.

¹⁴ Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*, x.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Art Spiegelman and Hillary Chute, *MetaMaus* (United States of America: Pantheon Books, 2011), 58-59.

reflexively comments on his own work *within* the work (as Spiegelman does in *Maus*), or if one addresses truth implicitly through multiple references to the ways in which *the* truth can be construed, as Alison Bechdel does in *Fun Home*. Interestingly, the ability to visually and textually allude to representational problems in terms of the truth actually seems to legitimize the artist's credibility. As Hatfield claims in *Alternative Comics*, "self-reflexive and mock-autobiographical devices paradoxically serve to reinforce autobiography's claims to truth."¹⁷ Not because the visual representations are inherently more truthful than the textual ones; on the contrary, visual depictions more explicitly point to the impossibility of an accurate re-representation of the past. It is precisely because of this impossibility that a visual narrative that faithfully attempts to reconstruct the past, while simultaneously addressing its representational limits, may consequently more easily achieve its claim of being as accurate as possible.

Theory, Testimony and the Graphic Narrative

Testimonial narratives in the comics medium have sprung from the autobiographical turn that comics took in the 60s and onwards. In fact, these testimonials are clearly linked to sub-genres such as biography, autobiography, memoir or reportage; giving testimony is a way of engaging with and dealing with memories of the past – these memories are always connected to truthfulness around experiences. The self-reflexive nature of graphic narratives addresses truthfulness in a distinctive manner that allows the reader to position him or herself as a listener of testimony; the artist(s) attempt to visualize the past truthfully, while simultaneously making the reader aware of the fact that he or she accepts the representational limitations that any recreation of the past will have. This allows the reader to see the narrative for what it is; a capturing of personal, individual sensory memories and other clues from the past that culminate in what today constitutes normal and/or traumatic memories.

The main theory that will be used in this thesis is that of trauma theory, with a special emphasis on what has been written on the act of giving testimony. Theorists such as Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth will primarily be used in order to highlight how the graphic narratives are able to visually and textually communicate, or go against, established notions of what constitutes testimony.

¹⁷ Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*, x.

Testimonial narratives are normally not considered to be a genre, but rather a part of a memoir, an autobiography, or a documentary. Narratives become testimonies when works of the previously mentioned genres attempt to recreate, or rather, to re-discover and consequently deal with memories of traumatic events that have escaped from the artist's (or another person's) memory. To represent trauma is to represent an absence, to testify to "occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference."¹⁸ The re-remembering that follows with testimony is thus not a recreation of what has been experienced, but rather a process of which forgotten memories are acquired, and, in turn, a more complete understanding of what has been experienced appears. Giving testimony is also supposed to be a curative process, and although this is not necessarily always what happens, communication of difficult experiences, in the form of visual and textual representation, will help the witness reach a deeper insight into where and what the traumatic memories originate from.

In spite of the fact that testimonies are often found within larger sub-genres of writing such as the autobiography or the memoir, testimonies have, in fact, emerged as a distinct genre in the 20th century. As Elie Wiesel writes, "If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony."¹⁹ The term "Holocaust testimony", which has become the dominant figure of testimony in our time, captures the essence of what testimonies simultaneously communicate and fail to communicate; the exact absence of words to describe the horror, the losses, and the awful memories are what the narratives essentially attempt to deal with, and in turn, to confront. Talking and writing about trauma is definitely an important aspect of working-through what has been experienced. Judith Herman has, however, established that "At times the patient may spontaneously switch to nonverbal methods of communication, such as drawing or painting. Given the iconic, visual nature of the traumatic memories, creating pictures may represent the most effective initial approach to 'indelible images'."²⁰ This reaction puts graphic narratives in a unique position; the narratives are simultaneously vested in textual and visual communication, and when one of the communicative voices fail, the other can

¹⁸ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 5.

¹⁹ Elie Wiesel, *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), 9.

²⁰ Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 177.

help out. This would suggest why graphic memoirs, autobiographies and reportages have become popular genres to communicate testimony in. Testimonials have been a part of the literary tradition for some time, ranging from slave narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* and Rigoberta Menchú Tum's famous testimonial *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, to the aforementioned tradition of Holocaust testimonials. It is, however, only in the past 30 years that testimonial narratives have been created in a co-mix of visual and textual story-telling, employing the unique narrative medium of comics to communicate and deal with traumatic experiences.

In his work *History and its Limits*, Dominick LaCapra comments on how testimonial narratives are simultaneously challenged and acknowledged on the basis of bearing the marks of trauma. Moreover, he suggests, in line with Herman, that testimony may take many forms and be communicated in various ways:

Testimony is itself both threatened and somehow authenticated or validated insofar as it bears the marks of, while not being utterly consumed and distorted by, the symptomatic effect of trauma. But testimony may shade into various kinds of commentary on experience and the events it involved.²¹

Graphic narratives have the potential to discover new areas of testimonial representation and communication. This is not only exciting because readers can experience new forms of narrative communication, but also because graphic testimonies can help traumatized individuals deal with their experiences in new ways. The judgment that some people apply to the comics medium, that it is a childish exercise, does, in relation to testimony, warrant a certain inherent truthfulness that is well worth noting. For while a fixed, non-negotiable view of comics as childish shows ignorance, one fact remains; we understand drawings and create visual depictions before we start reading and writing. Visual communication may, as Herman shows, consequently be an effective communicative process that can work in relation to the already established forms of verbal and oral testimony. The interplay between visual and textual presentation can, consequently, possibly work more effectively than any one of them in isolation in order for the traumatized person to begin a curative process. This means that the reader will, in turn, also be able to understand underlying traumatic communication, implicit or explicit,

²¹ Dominick LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 61-62.

better. For if the artist is able to communicate trauma better through the comics medium than another medium (what constitutes better is up to the individual), then the reader will, most likely, have a better chance of becoming a listener of testimony. This is also the case due to the previously mentioned part of comics called *closure*, a point that will be presented in the next paragraph.

The potential of comics to explore new areas of representation is a topic Marianne Hirsch addresses in one of her of *PMLA* editor's columns. The column, called "Collateral Damage" discusses, amongst other subjects Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadows of No Towers* and its communication of Spiegelman's traumatic experience from September 11th:

Comics highlight both the individual frames and the space between them, calling attention to the compulsion to transcend the frame in the act of seeing. They thus startlingly reveal the limited, obstructed vision that characterizes a historical moment ruled by trauma and censorship.²²

Panels are essentially freeze-frame moments, still moments that in sequence with other freeze-frames are created into a transitional flow by the reader. The reader commits what McCloud has describes as closure in the gutters of panels.²³ Readers create meaning through the transitional flow of the individual panels in comics; panels that are inherently segregated by the gutters between them, and which only receive a meaningful transitional flow through closure. As McCloud points out, "Comics panels *fracture* both *time* and *space*, offering a *jagged, staccato rhythm* of *unconnected moments*. But closure allows us to *connect* these moments and *mentally construct* a *continuous, unified* reality."²⁴ The concept of closure will be discussed more in-depth in the chapter on *Fun Home*.

Although the reader creates a transitional sequence when reading comics, most will be aware of how comics simultaneously also, as Hirsch suggests, highlight the individual frames and consequently show how little is actually revealed from a given scene. This, in turn, can be seen as a mimicking of some of the symptoms of trauma, representations of memories that are only partially and fragmentary in the witnesses' mind. While both the visual (film) and the textual (biography, memoir or a reportage) have their individual advantages in relation to communication of testimony, a graphic

²² Marianne Hirsch, "Editor's Column: Collateral Damage," *PMLA* 119, 5 (2004): 1213.

²³ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 66.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

narrative has the advantage of combining the two communicative voices, allowing the testifying individual(s) more freedom and possibilities in terms of expressing their experiences.

The Graphical Subjects

Few comics have received as much critical interest and praise as the two graphic narratives of *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel. While Spiegelman's graphic memoir is the only comic to have ever won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize (1992)²⁵, Bechdel's *Fun Home* was, when it came out in 2006, listed as one of the best works of the year in *The New York Times* and *Times Magazine*.^{26,27} Bechdel was previously known as a creator of queer comics. Her strip, "Dykes To Watch Out For," ran from 1983 to 2008 but it was only in 2006, when *Fun Home* was published, that Bechdel received attention across different genres of comics, and even outside the comics medium. Even more recently, the animated film *Waltz with Bashir* has received much critical acclaim since it was released in 2008 (for example a nomination for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film)²⁸, and was in 2009 made into a graphic narrative.

Over the years Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* has become a milestone within the genre of graphic memoirs. "Maus" was first published in an underground comic magazine called *Funny Animals* in 1972, however, Spiegelman first started drawing *Maus, Volume I* in 1978.²⁹ The complete work is a collection of two volumes, published in 1986 and 1992. *Maus* is based on conversations that Artie and Vladek (his father) had over several years, and which mostly were recorded on a tape recorder. The narrative is a heartfelt attempt to present Vladek's testimony. The tale starts in pre war Poland and gives an account of Vladek and Anja's, Art's mother, movement (Anja's voice is absent) till some time after World War II has ended. In-

²⁵ The Pulitzer Prizes, "1992 Winners and Finalists," accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/1992>.

²⁶ TNYT, "100 Notable Books of the Year," accessed March 28, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/books/review/20061203notable-books.html?ref=books>.

²⁷ The Times, "The 10 Best Books of 2006," accessed March 28, 2012. <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=the+10+best+books+of+2006&x=0&y=0&p=tto&pf=all&bl=on>

²⁸ The Academy of motion Picture Arts and Sciences, "Nominees & Winners for the 81st Academy Awards," accessed March 8, 2012. <http://www.oscars.org/awards/81academyawards/nominees.html>.

²⁹ Harold Marcuse, "Reading Questions and Resources for Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986,1991)," accessed August 12, 2011. <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/33dTexts/maus/MausResources.htm>.

between Vladek's testimony, the reader is introduced to Artie's present day life in New York.³⁰ In these parts of the narrative Vladek's testimony turns into Artie's own testimony. The reader is shown Artie's struggle with his mother's suicide, the strained relationship with his father and the challenges of writing and drawing the Holocaust. Furthermore the narrative shows how the trauma of WW II belatedly affects Artie, how it was passed down to the second-generation survivor. The collaborative aspect of the graphic narrative is pinpointed in Vladek's storytelling and Spiegelman's visualization of this story, a witness-listener relation that characterizes how testimony is often given. However, additionally, as Spiegelman testifies to a difficult, traumatic life, the reader is also made into a listener. It is mainly the latter testimony that will be the focus of the chapter on *Maus*. This testimony has to do with the concept of intergenerational trauma, and moreover, postmemory. Postmemory's hold on Art Spiegelman, and the communication of it generally throughout *Maus* and more specifically in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case Study" will be the focal point in the chapter on *Maus*.

Fun Home presents Alison Bechdel's traumatic childhood and adolescent years, a period greatly affected by her relationship with her closeted, homosexual father, an emotionally distant mother, and Alison's own qualms about her sexuality. The entire graphic narrative is centered around Alison's relationship with her father, and while there are numerous examples throughout *Fun Home* of Bruce's inability to be a loving and caring father, the narrative also focuses on Alison and Bruce's complicated relation to their sexuality, and their love for literature. While the frame-narrator of *Fun Home* remains a somewhat emotionally distanced teller of the past, and while Bechdel painstakingly attempts to be truthful, the emotional investment in Bechdel's personal narrative should not be neglected. In fact, as will be argued, the particular distance of the frame-narrator in *Fun Home* is closely connected to the way in which the reader must receive the narrative. Moreover, critics have tended to comment on Bechdel's graphic narrative to be an especially literary narrative. While this is clearly the case, part of this chapter's focus will be on some of the distinctly graphical aspects of *Fun Home* that communicates testimony. Additionally, the aforementioned extensive use of literary and other intertextual references will be focused on, particularly addressing how intertextuality is used, visually and textually, as a tool for communicating testimony.

³⁰ I will use three different names to distinguish between the different instances of the author in and around the graphic narrative. Spiegelman will be used in relation to the author, Artie will be used to depict him in the past speaking with Vladek, or as a younger self and Art will be used to name the self-reflexive narrator that the reader encounters in "Time Flies".

All of this is closely linked to the reader's role as a listener of testimony in *Fun Home*. It is precisely this point that will be the over-arching focus in the chapter on *Fun Home*.

Waltz with Bashir is Ari Folman's narration of a journey he undertook to regain his lost memories from the first Lebanon war. This journey leads him to converse with different people, both known and unknown to him, regarding their role in the same war. The entire graphic narrative of *Waltz with Bashir* becomes an example of the process of giving testimony; it shows how Folman's conversations with different people helps him reach an awareness of his own past experiences. Additionally, while Folman wrote the screenplay to the animated film, he did not do any actual drawings. A team of artists, lead by David Polonsky, created the visual aspects of Folman's testimony. The cooperation of both the creative process, and the process of which Folman regains his lost memories, points to a collaboration that is quite unique for a testimonial narrative. It is precisely the collaborative aspect of the narrative that will be the focus of the discussion on *Waltz with Bashir*. Folman and Polonsky's graphic narrative is an interesting example of how comics can pave way for new ways in which testimony can be communicated.

Giving testimony implies a witness-listener relation. When testimony is given in a textual and/or visual medium the therapeutical process often takes place in the interaction between the narrative and the reader. Consequently, this communication will be one of the main issues that will be returned to in each of the chapters. I will attempt to address how the different artist(s) communicate their testimony to the reader, focusing on postmemory in the chapter on *Maus*, closure in the chapter on *Fun Home* and on collaborativeness in the chapter on *Waltz with Bashir*. Due to the special collaborative style of *Waltz with Bashir*, the reader will be less of a focus in this chapter, although, the role of the reader will still be addressed. Furthermore, I will discuss how certain elements of the bimodal communication in the respective narratives show how graphic narratives have the potential of communicating trauma and other relevant topics with regards to testimony in a unique manner.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this thesis I will use the terms “graphic narrative” and “graphic memoir” interchangeably when referring to the three narratives in question. While graphic memoir is more specific than graphic narrative, both terms are equally applicable to the three memoirs. I will also use the term “comics” (as has been done already in the introduction) when speaking of the entire medium of comics. The label “graphic novel” will not be used as I feel that it is, on the one hand, as general as graphic narrative, however, simultaneously implying a relationship to the medium of written novels; a connection that in many cases is misleading.

Chapter 1: Art in Testimony

Maus' narrative focus is to articulate and visually represent Vladek Spiegelman's testimony of his experiences during the Shoah. Simultaneously, *Maus* also deals with Artie's reaction to this tale, Artie and Vladek's difficult relationship in the past and present, and of representing what is commonly deemed as unrepresentable.³¹ The prologue of *Maus* and the narrative-within-the-narrative of "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case Study" are examples of the way in which Spiegelman articulates how history and memory of the Holocaust is always looming in the background of their contemporary life as a survivor family. These sequences add another layer to Vladek's story in *Maus*: Spiegelman's depiction of himself in the graphic memoir becomes a testament to how children of survivors experience the trauma of the Holocaust. *Maus* produces a complication of the normal relationship between the narrator of testimony and its listener. In the narrative of *Maus*, Artie is a listener to, mediator of and a narrator of testimony. Part of what makes *Maus* unique in terms of a testimonial narrative is not only that Spiegelman's graphic narrative was one of the first visual comics representations of the Holocaust and that it presents the testimony of two people simultaneously, but also that it was the first graphic memoir to address the inter-generational issues pertaining to the second-generation inheritance of belated, traumatic experiences from WWII.

I will argue, in line with Marianne Hirsch's argument, that the premise for Artie's testimony in *Maus* is postmemory (both Hirsch and the term "postmemory" will be discussed in the following paragraph). I will first address a few specific moments in *Maus* where the reader is shown fragmented parts of Artie's young life, and discuss how they are explicit examples of postmemory and, in turn, examples of Spiegelman's personal testimony to the challenges of growing up as a survivor child. I have chosen to particularly focus on "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case Study", not just for its connection to postmemory, but also because this part of *Maus* has not, I believe, received enough critical attention and commentary. Furthermore, I will argue that the few instances where Spiegelman depicts how the young Artie is affected by his parents' memories are especially important in order to establish why Vladek's testimony also must contain (or be contained by) Artie's own testimony. I will also discuss the role of

³¹ See Cathy Caruth's discussion on the impossibility of communicating trauma in the introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

the reader in the narrative; it seems clear that if Spiegelman has a personal testimony within *Maus*, it falls on the reader to receive this testament.

Postmemory

After having read *Maus*, literary critic Marianne Hirsch felt that there was a need to come up with a term that could articulate and describe Spiegelman's memories more accurately than, for example, "absent memory" (term originating from Ellen Fine).³² "Absent memory" focuses on the precise lack of memory that follows intergenerational memory, however, as Hirsch has claimed: "Postmemory—often obsessive and relentless—need not be absent or evacuated; it is as full and as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself."³³ In the winter of 1992 Hirsch wrote an article called "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory". The term "postmemory" has stuck with *Maus* ever since. Hirsch defines postmemory in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* as:

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.³⁴

The "imaginative investment and creation" that postmemory requires is especially poignant and interesting in relation to a graphic memoir/testimony such as *Maus*. For while Vladek's oral testimony to his son is, through Spiegelman's meticulous tape-recording of their conversations, invested in a contract of truth – the graphic testimony of Vladek's tale is largely based on historical, cultural or simply imaginative representations by Spiegelman. Consequently, Vladek's testimony is partly recreated as a direct result of postmemory; the way in which personal memories are often constructed through cultural and historical memories. Additionally, postmemory also addresses how children of survivors receive traumatic memories from their parents. In the case of *Maus* this process is mediated into a representation of how the listener (Artie) is affected by hearing the testimonial tale, and another layer (the one that is to be

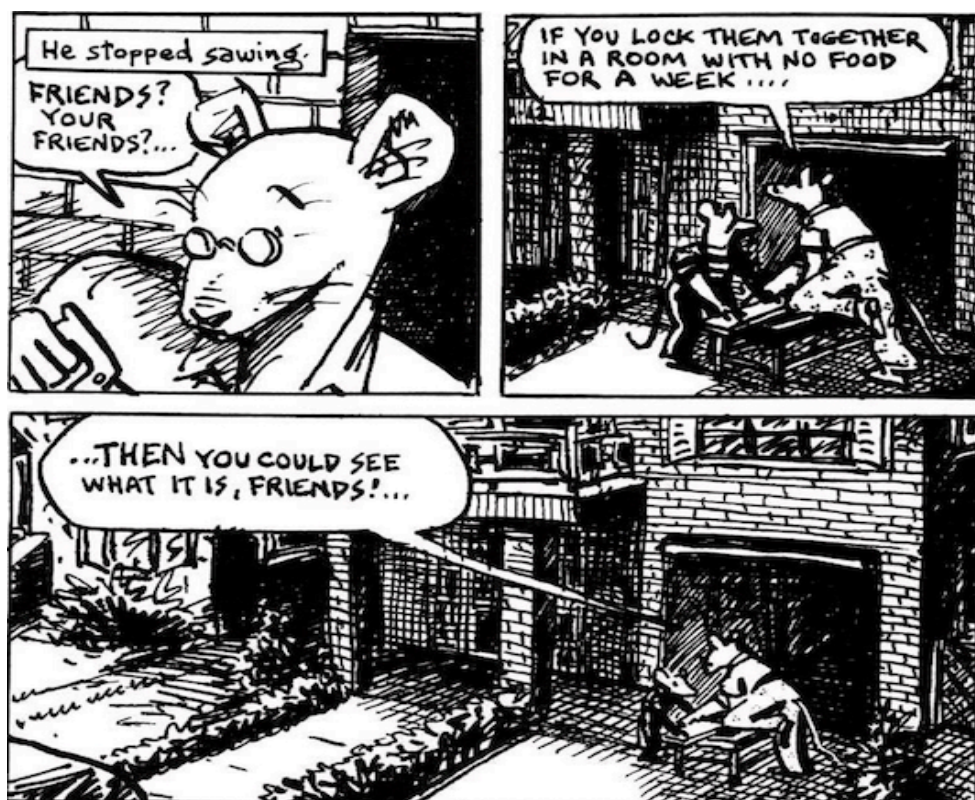
³² Ellen Fine, "The Absent Memory: The Act of Writing in Post-Holocaust French Literature," *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 41-57.

³³ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

³⁴ Ibid.

focused on here) of how the listener's own testimony is presented to the reader, and the way in which this presentation provides evidence for the premises of the entire narrative.

Precisely this form of communication with the reader is presented in the prologue to *Maus*, where Spiegelman introduces a short incident that occurred around the time when he was ten or eleven years old. Artie is skating with his friends Howie and Steve, when suddenly his skate comes loose. Artie falls and hits his leg, while the two other boys only laugh at him and skate away. Upon arriving at his home in Rego Park, Artie finds his father outside their garage sawing. "Artie! Come to hold this a minute while I saw." Vladek then notices that Artie is crying, and asks, "Why do you cry, Artie? Hold better on the wood." His son replies, "I-I fell, and my friends skated away w-without me." To which Vladek retorts, "*Friends? Your friends? ... If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week then you could see what it is, friends! ...*"³⁵



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig. 3,4 and 5, 6.

³⁵ Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), 6. The ellipses marked "..." are Spiegelman's, not mine. This also goes for ellipses like this in the other chapters. My ellipses are marked with spacing between the punctuation: "... " throughout the entire thesis.

This particular advice from Vladek pinpoints his ever-lasting relation to the Holocaust, and may serve as an example of what Dori Laub has called the “second Holocaust”:
 “The ‘second holocaust’ thus turns out to be itself a testimony to a history of repetition.”³⁶ The historical, overwhelming occurrence of the Holocaust is manifested so strongly in the survivor that it “in effect, *does not end*.”³⁷ This would, in turn, partly explain how postmemory is established in children of survivors. Vladek’s well meaning advice describes his inability to remove himself from the Holocaust - he is continually living in the past. This manifests in his son who, although incapable of understanding the context of Vladek’s advice, still feels that his experience is insignificant in relation to his parents’ past. Hirsch has described how the stories of children of survivors become dominated by the past experiences of their parents:

Thus postmemory characterizes the experience of those who, like me, have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration.³⁸

Spiegelman does not only verbalize this problem in the prologue; he also testifies to the reader graphically. In the first five panels of page five Artie is depicted as a relatively well-proportioned boy. However, on page six, Artie is portrayed continually regressing in size as the panels progresses, Artie is not only fading into black (into the shadow of his father’s Holocaust memories), he is made into a tiny character overwhelmed by the overshadowing presence of the previous generation. The prologue of *Maus* should thus be read as a way of establishing how Vladek’s past experiences influenced Artie as he was growing up, the sense of having what Artie himself characterizes as “**some** kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did.”³⁹ In *Maus*, Artie’s shrink, Pavel, suggests that Vladek’s consistent arguing with, and devaluation of his son’s experiences may originate from a survivor’s guilt, a guilt that springs from surviving something which similar people to you did not survive.⁴⁰ This guilt is taken out on Artie, who receives a second-generation survivor’s guilt. Guilt thus becomes an important part of

³⁶ Laub, *Testimony*, 67.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: The Athelone Press, 2004), 221.

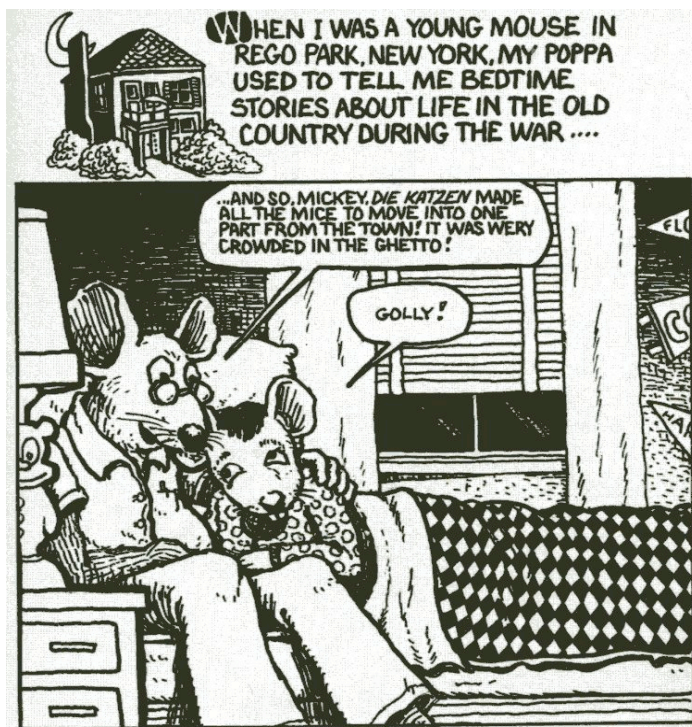
³⁹ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 176.

⁴⁰ Robert D. Calhoun, “Survivor’s guilt: What Long-term Survivors Don’t Talk About,” accessed October 31, 2011.

<http://virginiatech.healthandperformancesolutions.net/Anniversary%20Articles/Survivor%20Guilt%20What%20Long-term%20Survivors%20Don't%20Talk%20About.pdf>.

how postmemory is reinforced in children of survivors. This link is, however, far from the only tie postmemory has with the narrative of *Maus*.

The title of the first volume of *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* serves to articulate how postmemory is established by parents in children of survivors. This title is especially descriptive in terms of postmemory when seen in relation to two artistic representations made by Spiegelman. The first frame is taken from “Maus”.⁴¹ It depicts a young Artie lying in bed with his dad next to him telling him stories from the Holocaust. Already at a young age, Artie is told fragmented parts of Vladek’s testimony from the Holocaust.



Spiegelman, “Maus”, *Funny Animals* fig. 2.



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig. 2, 105.

testimony; the establishment of postmemory in the young Artie.

In the second panel alluded to, postmemory is more forcefully reproduced. The panel is taken from “Prison on the Hell Planet: A Case Study”, and depicts yet again a young Artie lying in bed listening to bedtime stories. However, this time, it is his mother that is telling him stories, and although it is unclear what is being told, the Auschwitz prisoner clothing that Artie is wearing is unmistakable. Spiegelman refers graphically to the influence and presence of postmemory in his childhood. These panels,

the needed prerequisite for Artie’s later listening of his father’s

⁴¹ Robert Crumb, *Funny Animals* (San Francisco: Apex Novelties, 1972).

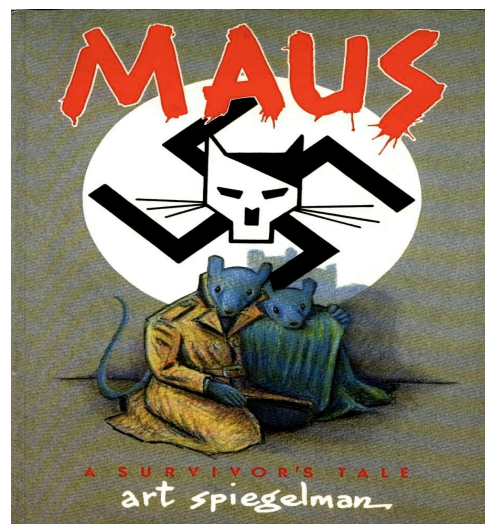
quite uniquely present Spiegelman's own testament to the reader, a testament to how postmemory dominated his childhood long before Artie could recognize it himself. With this in mind, it seems clear that it is not only Vladek who bleeds history and postmemory, Anja does as well. As Hilary Chute has said with regard to the panel of Artie and his mother reading together in bed: "Artie inherited the burden that the uniform represents, in a natural transfer of pain that wasn't consciously accepted or rejected but seamlessly assumed. He earned his stripes at birth."⁴²

The silent cover pages of *Maus I* and *II* are also important in relation to how Spiegelman establishes postmemory in *Maus*. While the first cover page is concerned with the influence of family in relation to postmemory, the second cover page addresses the relation between cultural memory, historical memory and personal history.

The cover of *Maus I* is, in terms of representation, somewhat ambiguous. That Vladek is the person on the left in the image seems clear, the other person's identity is, on the other hand, left unanswered in *Maus*. However, through published sketches on the DVD-ROM of *MetaMaus* it is made clear that the person is Anja.⁴³ In spite of this fact, it is interesting to note that Spiegelman has chosen to portray Anja without any physical attributes that would determine her character, or even her sex. In one of the earlier sketches Spiegelman made, Anja's womanly features are visualized more forcefully.



Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, DVD-ROM, preliminary sketch of cover page.



Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, cover page.

⁴² Hilary Chute, "The Shadow of a Past Time": History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 52, 2 (2006): 208, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20479765>.

⁴³ *MetaMaus: Sketches* DVD-ROM: Viking, 2011.

Spiegelman's final version of the cover page suggests an ambiguity, a more "iconic" rendering of Anja⁴⁴, which makes it difficult for the reader to determine with certainty who the person on the right is supposed to be. In fact, I will argue that due to a specific clue left elsewhere in Spiegelman's bibliography it could also be argued that the depiction of Anja resembles a young Artie.

The argument that Artie could be the person on the right on the cover page of *Maus*, springs from the panel from "Maus" discussed previously. In this very first artistic representation of what later became *Maus*, Art Spiegelman has drawn an image of a young Artie lying in bed, with his father sitting next to him telling him bedtime stories from the Holocaust. Vladek's arm, which is firmly held around Artie's back, bears a clear resemblance to the arm around the ambiguous mouse on the cover of *Maus I*. The act of story-telling that takes place in the panel from "Maus" is a representation of how Vladek's traumatic memories from the Holocaust are retold and brought into the young Artie's contemporary world. As Eva Hoffman relates concerning the silence of survivors, "But they also spoke—how could they help it? —to their immediate intimates, to spouses and siblings, and, yes, to their children."⁴⁵ Children of survivors were indoctrinated to the horrors of the Holocaust; they were expected to understand it, as they were of the same blood. Hirsch has suggested that it is this deep connection with the family's past, a connection created by postmemory, that has made second-generation writers and artists of "fiction, art, memoir and testimony" so determined "to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma."⁴⁶ Following the analogy of the title of *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, the cover page illustration could be interpreted as a representation of Artie's personal testament, another reminder of the presence of postmemory embedded in the entire *Maus* work. The presence of postmemory could thus be seen as covering the entire narrative of *Maus* – wrapped around the graphic memoir by its very cover.

The title *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* receives yet another dimension to it when seen in relation to Scott McCloud's discussion of "bleeds". In his work, *Understanding Comics*, McCloud suggests:

⁴⁴ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 42.

⁴⁵ Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 9.

⁴⁶ Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, 1 (2008): 112, doi: 10.1215/03335372-2007-019.

When the *content* of a silent panel offers no clues as to its *duration*, it can also produce a sense of *timelessness*. . . . When “*bleeds*” are used -- I.E., when a panel runs off the edge of the *page* -- this effect is *compounded*. Time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the *closed panel*, but instead *hemorrhages* and escapes into *timeless space*.⁴⁷

Although bleeds on the covers of both written novels and graphic novels are quite common (normally called “full bleed” in printing terminology, and “splash page” in comics terminology), the bleeding cover of *Maus I*, if the argument for its link to postmemory can be accepted, alludes to the ever present Holocaust in both Vladek and Artie’s lives. Vladek’s attempt to shelter Artie is futile; his voice, touch and thoughts are all conditioned by the Holocaust. The bleeding cover page thus communicates the compounded effect that McCloud speaks of; the relationship between Vladek’s testimony from the Holocaust and Artie’s own testimony. One preceding the other, however, still connected in an interwoven relationship that is difficult to separate in a strict sense of *now* and *then*. The cover page hemorrhages and dissolves the past and the future, now and then; the future is made into something that is always connected to the past. The complicated notion of and relationship between past and present is alluded to extensively within *Maus* as well.

The mix between past and present in the narrative of *Maus* seems to have close ties to how postmemory affects Artie. This allows postmemory to function as a way of linking Spiegelman’s visualization of Vladek’s testimony into the contemporary present-time of the narrative in *Maus*. During their stay with Vladek in the Catskills, Artie and Françoise, Artie’s wife, make a trip with him to return some groceries at the local supermarket. Artie strikes up a conversation about prisoners who rebelled and blew up a crematorium in Auschwitz, and Vladek continues by relating what he remembers from this incident: “Yah. For this they all got killed. And the four young girls what sneaked over the ammunitions for this, they hanged them near to my workshop.”⁴⁸ The panel depicts their car driving through the woods, Vladek narrating, with the lower bodies of four people hanging from the trees. This representation suggests a temporal bleed, a certain act of coming together between contemporary life and the past. The distinctly unique possibility of visual mediums to connect past and

⁴⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 102-103.

⁴⁸ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 239.

present leaves a difficult question to the reader.



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig 7, 239.

Is this Spiegelman's visualization of Vladek's trauma, or is it his own belated trauma of his father's stories? The graphical presentation allows for a subtle transition between past and present, merging two geographical places and different time zones into one. Furthermore, it merges Vladek's traumatic memories from the Holocaust with Artie's postmemories. The responsibility a listener of testimony has to let "these trauma fragments make their impact both on him and on the witness,"⁴⁹ is complicated in *Maus*, as the relationship between witness/listener in the narrative is not limited to Vladek and Artie, but also to Artie and the reader. Consequently, it is important that the reader can recognize that spatial time in comics allows him or her to simultaneously listen to two generations of testimonies.⁵⁰ Traumatic memory and postmemory can occupy the same space (inside of a panel) in an intergenerational testimonial narrative. Alison Bechdel's "tricky reverse narrations"⁵¹ in *Fun Home* also challenges the concepts of past and present. Bechdel's use of time (through panel transitions) as distinctly plastic matter will be returned to in the chapter on *Fun Home*.

Hemorrhaging bleeds are sparsely used throughout *Maus*. The most influential bleed appears on page 159 of *The Complete Maus*. This panel depicts Vladek and Anja's arrival to Auschwitz in 1944 through the now iconic main gate. Hirsch has pointed out that Spiegelman's visualization of Vladek's testimony is here grounded in a cultural, rather than a factual memory: "Art Spiegelman in *Maus* draws Vladek's arrival and departure from Auschwitz through the main gate, which could not have been true in 1944-45 when the gate was no longer used in this way."⁵² The gate of Auschwitz, with

⁴⁹ Laub, *Testimony*, 71.

⁵⁰ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 100.

⁵¹ Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), 232.

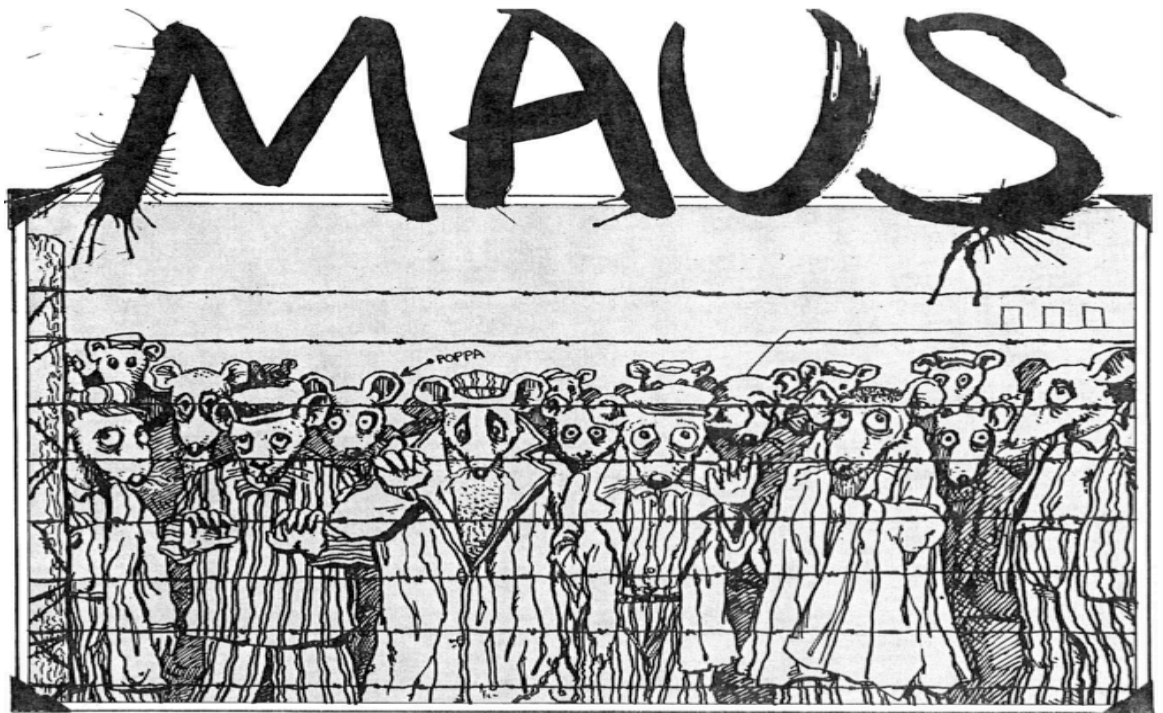
⁵² Hirsch, "Surviving Images," 228.

the famous slogan “Arbeit macht frei,” is the cultural and historical image that everyone imagines when thinking of Auschwitz. The fact that Vladek and Anja could not have entered Auschwitz through this gate only emphasizes the presence of Artie’s personal testimony in *Maus*. The depiction of the truck with Vladek and Anja entering through the gate of Auschwitz is Spiegelman’s graphic presentation of his postmemory. This is an example of a public, historical image made into a two-layered personal testament; the atrocities experienced during the Holocaust, and the “remembered” postmemory of the same event created by the child of survivors. Vladek testifies his memories of how it felt to enter Auschwitz – Artie, in turn, mediates his conception of this testimony, a visualization built on and determined by cultural and historical images appropriated through postmemory as real memories.

The link between cultural images and appropriated familial photographs is another clear connection between postmemory and Artie’s testimony in *Maus*. The cover-page of the second volume of *Maus: And Here My Troubles Began* seems to be an adaptation of the first panel drawn in “Maus”. The panel from “Maus” is similar to that of photographs from liberated prisoners after the war, and is actually based, according to Marianne Hirsch,⁵³ on a photograph by Margaret Bourke White taken from the liberation of Buchenwald Concentration Camp.⁵⁴ However, apart from the obvious difference between real human beings and mice, the panel has several distinctive graphic elements that transform the public image into a personal image.

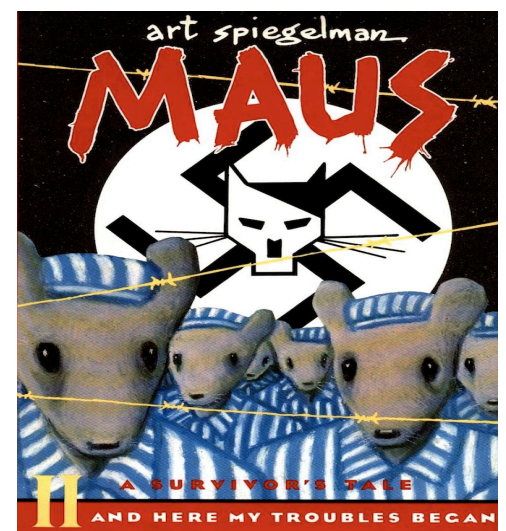
⁵³ Martha Kuhlman, “Marianne Hirsch on Maus,” *Indy Magazine*, (2005), accessed August 19, 2011. http://web.archive.org/web/20060504205433/http://64.23.98.142/indy/winter_2005/kuhlman_hirsch/index.html.

⁵⁴ “Survivors of Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” accessed August 19, 2011. <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Buchenwald/Liberation7.html>.



Spiegelman, "Maus", in *Funny Animals* fig. 1.

The panel is drawn with four clips, one on each side of the photo, as if the panel was a copy of a photo from a photo album. Additionally, Spiegelman has written "poppa" (imitating the voice of the little boy the reader sees in the next panel of the three-page "Maus" strip) and drawn an arrow pointing to an individual in the background of the image. These graphic appropriations of a public image suggest how a child of a survivor is unable to imagine his parents' past without using cultural images.⁵⁵ This points to a larger issue regarding *Maus* as a multi-layered testimonial narrative. While Spiegelman draws the panel in order for it to look like a depiction of a real photograph of a family member, a *real* memory, the historical context of the original photograph points to the way in which postmemory is unable to produce a direct link to the past. To present testimony partially through postmemory is precisely to give witness and communicate the otherness of a traumatic event. However, the appropriation of the cultural image also suggests how postmemory



Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, cover page.

⁵⁵ Hirsch, "Surviving Images," 219-220.

in *Maus* is directly linked to testimony. While this initially gives the mediator of the testimony an authenticity problem, Spiegelman resolves this through *Maus*' self-referential nature. It allows Spiegelman to both problematize the representations of another person's testimony and his own testimony, *within* the narrative. In order to assimilate and mediate his father's testimony, Spiegelman must address how his own postmemory is linked to his visual and textual representation of the events; the narrative requires Spiegelman's personal depictions (his postmemories and historical reproductions) of both his own and his father's testimonies.

The Prisoner of Postmemories

Shoshana Felman writes in *Testimony* of a surprising turn of events that took place in one of her classes at Yale University called "Literature and Testimony".⁵⁶ The class had, after a screening of a testimony made by a woman who survived WWII, broken down into complete muteness; this was followed, in the hours and days after the class, by a great need to speak about what they had seen. This sudden need to vocalize their feelings was frustrating to the students, as they were unable to articulate exactly *what* had been experienced.⁵⁷ The students had become obsessed with what they had seen and heard – they felt as if they themselves had experienced something "not just painful, but very powerful."⁵⁸ The obsession that the students felt in relation to the Holocaust testimony lead to what Felman has described as something of which broke "*the very framework of the class*."⁵⁹

Dominick LaCapra makes a similar observation in his work, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. LaCapra argues that testimony challenges history in that it makes the listener a secondary witness. The listener is put in a "transfential relation", a relation that often evokes a personal reaction to the testimony: "Transference here implies the tendency to become emotionally implicated in the witness and his or her testimony with the inclination to act out an affective response to them."⁶⁰ This tendency can be seen in relation to Felman's observation regarding the "broken framework", and furthermore suggests why there are many examples of breaks in the narrative of *Maus*. Spiegelman's inclusion of framework breaking elements in *Maus* can be seen as an

⁵⁶ Felman, *Testimony*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 11-12.

affective response to Vladek's story; responses that implicate another testimony, a testimonial of how postmemory has affected Artie.

In *Maus* the most prominent examples of these breaks are the three photographs spread out over the two volumes. Physically, these photographs break the framework of the narrative through their tilted presence in and outside the panel (the photograph of Richieu is an exception, however, this photograph is presented outside the main narrative, in a dedication to him and Spiegelman's two children). Furthermore, there seems to be a clear dissonance in the narrative when, amongst drawings of human beings with mouse, cat, pig, dog or reindeer heads, the reader is introduced to real photographs presenting Artie and Anja, Richieu, and Vladek. These photographs do not only break with the anthropomorphic metaphor of the narrative, they also break with the strict dichotomy of Spiegelman's textual authenticity and graphic freedom. There is reason to believe that they are intentionally placed there for a specific reason: to simultaneously validate and mystify the people they present. For while the photographs certainly show Spiegelman's family, they also make the reader aware of all that he (and in turn, also us) can never know of Richieu, Anja and Vladek. The powerful images of Spiegelman's family resonate in the reader, giving a deeper insight into Spiegelman's own reaction to his father's testimony. By establishing a way for the reader to feel his pain, Spiegelman creates a bond that allows him to present *his* testimony to another listener than himself - the listener of the text - the reader.

In *Maus*, there is especially one place in the narrative where Spiegelman presents his own testimony of a very traumatic experience. "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History" is the most visual and clear break with the framework of *Maus*. "Hell Planet" was originally published in 1973⁶¹; however, it was reprinted and included in *Maus* as a part of the narrative. A friend of Mala, Vladek's second wife, showed her the narrative, and although she kept it hidden, Vladek somehow found it. "Hell Planet" is, in contrast to *Maus*, not a collaborative work between father and son, but rather a very personal testament to the guilt and desperation Artie felt after Anja's suicide. The narrative is removed from Vladek's testimony of the Holocaust (although simultaneously deeply connected to the Holocaust); it engages the reader with Artie's personal testimony of his mother's suicide. Moreover, Spiegelman uses visual and textual clues to connect his parents' past, and, in turn, its effect on him, to account for

⁶¹ Art Spiegelman, "Prisoner of the Hell Planet," *Short Order Comix* 1 (Head Press, 1973).

Anja's suicide. Postmemory thus becomes a key-term for "Hell Planet" as a testimonial narrative.

The graphic style of "Hell Planet" has a distinctive style that separates it from the rest of the *Maus* narrative. Spiegelman's stylistic choices in "Hell Planet" seem to suggest a closer, and more personal characterization of how trauma feels. In "Hell Planet" people are represented and drawn with human bodies and faces. In difference from *Maus*, the 4-page narrative shows humans drawn in an expressionistic, yet somewhat realistic style⁶², where tears and feelings permeate the frames. In fact, although several critics have pointed out "Hell Planet's" similarity to German



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig 5, 104.

expressionism⁶³, most seem to have missed the connection to Edward Munch's "Scream" (1893), which has often been claimed to be the most iconic expressionistic painting ever made (although "Scream" was essentially an inspirational source to the expressionistic movement, not a part of it). Munch expresses in "Scream" his feeling of anxiety, and it seems here vital to stress the visual representation of anxiety, for in "Hell

Planet" this scream of anxiety is alluded to directly in the fifth panel of page 104, where Vladek is depicted screaming at the top of his lungs for Anna (Anja). However, just as importantly the reader is also shown Artie's reaction to his father's scream. This is crucial for the "Hell Planet" narrative, as it reinforces the fact that this is Artie's personal testimony of his and his father's reaction to Anja's suicide.

⁶² Andreas Huyssen, "Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: The Athelone Press, 2004), 33.

⁶³ Chute, "The Shadow of a Past Time," 207.

The personal nature of the testimony in “Hell Planet” is further explored through



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig 2, 105.

the experimental use of panel-sequences. The second panel of page 105 shows Artie “alone with my thoughts,”⁶⁴ thinking of his mother. Although this is one single panel, the textual elements within the panel separate the graphical narrative, creating a pictorial sequence of memories within the panel. Spiegelman visualizes Anja in the bathtub (where she was found dead) while suggesting that the suicide could have had to do with menopausal depression; the reader is shown a pile of bodies with the swastika symbol on a wall pointing to the idea that “Hitler did it!”; furthermore, the reader is shown a young Artie lying in bed with his mother listening to bedtime stories, accompanying this is a hand extended from the utterance, “Mommy!”, with another hand coming in from the left of the panel

slashing the wrist. On the arm we can see the camp serial number tattoo that Anja received in Auschwitz. In the corner of the panel is an overwhelmed Artie burdened by an enormous grief and guilt. Here Spiegelman seems to play on the reader’s preconception of estimating time in comics by reading from left to right. By making one single panel in “Hell Planet” read from down to up, up to down, from left to right, or right to left, Spiegelman articulates visually the feeling of timeless guilt. The panel gives no answer to its direction, just as Anja’s reasons for committing suicide will forever remain a mystery. The panel leads the reader to see postmemory and guilt as a haunting, reappearing and inconclusive presence for Artie. Spiegelman articulates this impossibility of being able to “put it aside” in relation to the entire narrative of *Maus* in *MetaMaus*:

That line that Vladek used after he saw the “Prisoner on the Hell Planet” sequence, saying “It’s good you got this outside your system,” is what I was hoping to do: not so much to expunge it, but to give it shape and thereby be able to put it aside. Another bit of naïveté, because that is just not how things work. You travel with your baggage wherever you go.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 105.

⁶⁵ Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 76.

The timeless panel visually articulates how the past is always connected to the present; how postmemory shaped Artie as he grew up, and how it will continually remain a part of his life, similarly to his memories of Anja's suicide.

The visual testament of Artie's reaction to his mother's suicide in "Hell Planet" is emphasized in panel two and three on page 103. This sequence illustrates how the world goes from being perceptible and comprehensible to strange and distorted in the moment Artie learns of his mother's suicide. (This distorted style is used for the first time in "Hell Planet" when Spiegelman depicts Vladek in the moment he found Anja in the bathroom of their home). McCloud has observed in relation to backgrounds of panels that "Even when there is little or no distortion of the *characters* in a given scene, a distorted or expressionistic *background* will usually affect our "reading" of characters' *inner states*."⁶⁶



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig 2 and 3, 103.

This contrast between a somewhat perceptible reality and a distorted one is returned to later in the four-paged narrative (panel eight and nine, 104). These panels appear even more intensely than the previous sequence, enhancing Artie's feelings: "*I felt nauseous The guilt was overwhelming.*"⁶⁷ This graphic characterization illustrates what McCloud has said in relation to the works of Munch and Van Gogh, "an honest *expression* of the internal turmoil these artists just could not *repress*."⁶⁸ This can also be detected more generally throughout "Hell Planet"; the traumatic experience is enhanced

⁶⁶ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 132.

⁶⁷ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 104.

⁶⁸ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 122.

by the environment and background details of the panels, made out to describe Artie's feeling of loss, nausea and guilt. The panels of "Hell Planet" are descriptions of Artie's own emotions, not re-enactments of Vladek's testimony. This is a vital point that Spiegelman has addressed himself:

"Prisoner on the Hell Planet" was something that happened to me, something that affected me in a certain way that the style, heavily affected by German Expressionism, was appropriate. The Expressionists weren't trying to put things on canvas, they were trying to put emotions on canvas, and these emotions were very powerful and personal and that style fit. For me to appropriate my father's emotions and portray them in that style would have been very dishonest.⁶⁹

Spiegelman makes it clear that his visual style in both *Maus* and "Hell Planet" are narrative choices, choices that articulates the difference between the voice of Vladek and Artie as narrators. Consequently, the images as much as the uttered words can be seen as part of the testimonial narrative. "Hell Planet's" graphic style seems to indicate an intense artistic need to work-through, to give testimony to the pain and turmoil felt after Anja's suicide. The sequential narrative is not mediated through the voice of the listener, but rather through the testifier himself. "Hell Planet" is not just a comic-within-a-comic, it is also a testimony-within-a-testimony.

The testimony-within-a-testimony of "Hell Planet" intensifies the reader's responsibility as a listener in *Maus*, for while Vladek has Artie as a listener of his testimony, Artie must rely on the reader to be the listener of his. Similarly to the examples discussed in the first part of this chapter, "Hell Planet" brings forth Spiegelman's personal testimony in *Maus*. However, in difference from his testimony in the rest of *Maus*, Spiegelman's personal nature in "Hell Planet" is intensified through the graphical aspects of the narrative. Artie addresses the reader directly, both textually and graphically (the direct gaze) in the second panel of "Hell Planet", relating what has happened, while underscoring his accusatory tone towards his mother by ending his comment with an exclamation point, and by framing himself in a mugshot position, while dressed in the



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus* fig 2, 102.

⁶⁹Stephen, J. Bolhafner, "Art for Art's Sake: Spiegelman Speaks on RAW's Past, Present and Future," *The Comics Journal* 145 (1991) <http://bolhafner.com/stevesreads/ispieg2.html>.

Auschwitz prison uniform. As Françoise says in an interview in *MetaMaus*, “I remember first realizing who Art was, when I read “Prisoner on the Hell Planet.” . . . The main thing I couldn’t get over was: How could he acknowledge feeling sorry for himself rather than feeling sorry for his mother?”⁷⁰ The reason is that “Hell Planet” is essentially a testimony to Artie’s reaction to his mother’s suicide. As Spiegelman said in an interview, “I was the one who was supposed to discover the body . . . she’d invested her whole life in me. I was more like a confidante than a son.”⁷¹ Spiegelman felt a need to break free from both of his parents, and in the case of Anja “the way she tightened the umbilical cord.”⁷² Consequently, when Anja committed suicide Artie felt a double guilt: both the postmemory guilt of “having had an easier life than they did”⁷³, and the more immediate guilt of feeling that he is partly responsible for his mother’s suicide. This feeling of guilt is not uncommon in traumatized victims: “Traumatized people struggle to arrive at a fair and reasonable assessment of their conduct, finding a balance between unrealistic guilt and denial of all moral responsibility.”⁷⁴ The reader’s role is thus to be witness to his testimony, to let Artie come to terms with his guilt. This responsibility allows the reader to see “Hell Planet” as a testament for Spiegelman’s need to write *Maus*, an explicit articulation of what Andreas Huyssen has called “survivor guilt of the second degree”.⁷⁵ *Maus* is an articulation of his simultaneous attempt and failure of voicing his mother’s story.

Although postmemory haunts Artie’s consciousness in the entire narrative of *Maus*, it is only in “Hell Planet” that Spiegelman visually represents how Artie is explicitly confined by postmemory; Spiegelman depicts himself wearing a concentration camp uniform (even as a child), alluding to the shadow of the Holocaust that arches over him. As Joseph Witek points out in *Comic Books as History*: “Only in ‘Prisoner on the Hell Planet’ do we discover Art’s motivation for gathering his father’s story. Art can not afford a silence about the Holocaust – respectful or otherwise.”⁷⁶ Although I disagree that it is *only* in “Hell Planet” “we discover Art’s motivation for

⁷⁰ Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 95.

⁷¹ Lawrence Weschler, *Shapinski’s Karma, Bogg’s Bills, and Other True-Life Tales* (San Francisco: Northpoint Press, 1988). 62, quoted in Andrew Gordon, “Jewish Fathers and Sons in Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Roth’s *Patrimony*,” *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 1, 1 (2004): 16, http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v1_1/gordon/.

⁷² Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 105.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 68.

⁷⁵ Huyssen, “Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno”, 32.

⁷⁶ Joseph Witek, *Comic Books as History: the narrative of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (USA: University of Mississippi, 1989), 100.

gathering his father's story," it seems clear that in order to combat the presence of postmemory, Artie can no longer stay silent about the Holocaust, or his mother's suicide. He must testify to his feelings, even at the cost of all those who may feel that it is inappropriate. Hence the last comment in "Hell Planet", "*Pipe down, Mac!* Some of us are trying to sleep!"⁷⁷

In spite of "Hell Planet" being a testimony to Spiegelman's feelings after his mother's suicide, its inclusion in *Maus* also sets it in a bigger context. The framework of *Maus*, Artie's conversations with Vladek and, in turn, Vladek's testimony, does not permit the reader to see the testimony-within-a-testimony as distinctly segregated from the main narrative. Although it seems that Spiegelman wishes for it to be precisely so: "It's important in these pages to think of them as complete pages. In the book there's a black border around the whole page . . . it acts as a funeral border." (The "funeral borders" are not part of the original design of "Hell Planet").⁷⁸ Furthermore, Spiegelman has chosen not to paginate the "Hell Planet" pages of *Maus* (in addition to a few other pages in the narrative), clearly attempting to segregate "Hell Planet" from the rest of *Maus*. Even though the black borders of "Hell Planet" separate the narrative visually, Spiegelman's personal testament to Anja's suicide is nonetheless also seen in relation to Vladek's reaction, both immediately after Anja's suicide, and when Vladek first read the comic.

After "Hell Planet" is presented in *Maus* the reader is shown both Mala and Vladek's reaction to the testimony. While Mala focuses on the simultaneous accuracy and personal nature of the narrative, Vladek is more focused on his own reaction to it: "It's good you got it outside your system. But for me it brought in my mind so much **memories** of Anja."⁷⁹ Similar to the prologue to *Maus*, Artie's experience is overshadowed by his father's memories. Vladek is unable to see the emotion and pain that his son pours out through the testimony of "Hell Planet". Spiegelman's presentation of Vladek's lack of empathy with Artie's "lesser" experiences in his childhood and adolescent years becomes another example of how postmemory was and still is assumed by Artie, from an early age and into the present day.

⁷⁷ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 105.

⁷⁸ Michael G. Levine, "Necessary Stains: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Bleeding of History," in *Considering Maus Approaches to Art Spiegelman's "Survivor's Tale" of the Holocaust*, ed. Deborah R. Geis (Tuscaloosa and London: Alabama University Press, 2003), 87.

⁷⁹ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 106.

“Hell Planet” also addresses two vital clues for the entire narrative of *Maus*; firstly that Vladek and Artie’s grief over Anja’s suicide is a genuine reaction to a deeply traumatic experience that returns to both of them on several occasions in the narrative. Secondly that Vladek and Artie’s dominant voices in the narrative are at the cost of other marginalized voices. The most important missing voice in *Maus* is clearly Anja’s (Mala’s voice is, although present, also mostly ignored). In Vladek’s testimony Anja is exclusively described through his characterizations; in Artie’s testimony Anja’s voice is mostly absent (“Hell Planet” is the exception to this, however her voice is clearly marginalized here as well).



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, fig. 8, 14 (left panel) and fig. 6, 106 (right panel).

Despite this fact, it seems to be evident that the narrative of *Maus* (at least *Maus I*, in *Maus II* Artie has come to terms with the impossibility of filling Anja’s voice) fuels on precisely the search for Anja’s missing voice. In fact, several critics have gone even further to describe the importance of the fact that her voice is missing.

The premise for Artie’s testimony in “Hell Planet” is undeniably Anja’s suicide. Michael Levine has suggested that Vladek’s testimony in *Maus* is also established through her character: “In a sense the testimonial contract that the father and son negotiate in this scene is framed in the name of the mother.”⁸⁰ Vladek initially does not want to talk about his life, however when Artie says: “I want to hear it. Start with mom... Tell me how you met,”⁸¹ Vladek reluctantly begins his testimonial narrative.

⁸⁰ Levine, “Necessary Stains,” 77.

⁸¹ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 14.

With the exception of the prologue of *Maus I*, both Artie and Vladek's testimonies essentially take place because of Anja.

This exception is, however, still fundamentally connected to Anja. It allows Spiegelman to establish postmemory as it was assumed from an early age. By introducing postmemory as such a vital part of his life, and by further connecting it to his father and mother, Spiegelman reinforces its importance in the narrative. Similarly, "Hell Planet" is both visually and textually full of allusions to postmemory and it is therefore clear that Spiegelman attempts to articulate how Anja's suicide and postmemory are deeply connected – Artie's presentation of postmemory in "Hell Planet" seems to suggest that Anja's suicide was precisely the catalyst for his awareness of it as a concept.

"Hell Planet" portrays Anja's suicide as a haunting, and shared traumatic experience for both father and son. For although this is Artie's testimony, a narrative he never intended that his father would see, it still addresses Vladek's reaction to Anja's suicide. Vladek is stricken by an overwhelming grief, desperation so vivid that there are no examples of Vladek reacting like this anywhere else in *Maus*. In fact, Vladek shows a tendency of starting to regress, something of which the eleventh panel on page 103 suggests. The reader is shown Artie, kneeling over his father, attempting to comfort him, while Vladek can only mutter "Mother ... Mother ...".⁸² The traumatic experience for both Artie and Vladek becomes a shared experience

(although they react differently). Hirsch suggests in *Family Frames* that the death of Anja is the monumental loss of which Vladek and Artie build, in the words of Dori Laub:

libidinal investment . . . there is so much destruction recounted, so much death, so much loss, so much hopelessness, that there has to be an abundance of holding and of emotional investment in the encounter, to keep alive the witnessing narration; otherwise the whole experience of the testimony can end up in silence, in complete withholding.⁸³



Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, fig. 11, 103.

⁸² For a brief explanation of effects that can manifest in people who experience losses, see *Suicide in Later Life: Recognizing the Warning Signs* by Nancy J. Osgood, page 66.

⁸³ Laub, *Testimony*, 71.

Consequently, “Hell Planet” can be seen as important on two different scores; it establishes the reason why Artie can be the listener to Vladek’s testimony, and, in turn, also that Artie himself has experienced trauma at first hand. The mugshot of Artie in the second panel of “Hell Planet” visualizes the moment when he becomes arrested and captured by postmemory. Anja’s suicide was the last straw – the guilt and frustration of being a survivor child requires an outburst, a form of communication. Thus, the reappearing shadow of postmemory throughout the entire narrative of *Maus* becomes Spiegelman’s own act of testimony to the reader; the visual and literal articulation of postmemory shows why Spiegelman could no longer hold his tongue.

The most vital break with the framework of *Maus* in “Hell Planet” is the introduction of the first of a total of three real photographs in *Maus*. This particular photograph shows Anja and Artie in 1958 at a place called Trojan Lake. Anja is standing, holding her right hand on the ten-year-old Artie who is grinning while kneeling in the foreground. This photograph is the only one in *Maus* that can be linked to Spiegelman’s memory and not postmemory.⁸⁴ However, in *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman nonetheless suggests how the photograph can be linked to postmemory; Anja’s need for Artie as a confidante is smoldering away as he attempts to distance himself from the nuclear family: “Keeping a hand on a head is both a maternal gesture, but also a pushing down when somebody’s trying to get up. It evokes my childhood in an economical way that has something in common with the two-page prologue to *Maus*.”⁸⁵ Thus the photograph (similar to prologue of *Maus I*) can be seen as a way of further establishing how both of his parents, in different ways, permeated postmemory onto their son.

In sharp contrast to the happy boy in the photograph is ten years older Artie in the next panel: “In 1968, when I was 20, my mother killed herself.. She left no note!”⁸⁶ In these two panels, the line between life and death, happiness and desperation is juxtaposed through the interplay of photograph and artistry. Following in the line of Roland Barthes’ words: “ça a été” (“this has been”)⁸⁷, the photograph of Artie and Anja essentially describes the death of the moment and the people in it. As Hirsch has explained, “Poignantly, Spiegelman juxtaposes the archival photograph with the

⁸⁴ Hirsch, *Family Frames*: 36. The photograph of Richieu on page 165 was taken before Artie was born, similarly to the photograph of Vladek on page 294.

⁸⁵ Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 218.

⁸⁶ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 102.

⁸⁷ Hirsch discusses Barthes’ thoughts on photography in *Family Frames*. See for example the introduction and page 19-20 of the “Mourning and Postmemory” chapter.

message of death which, through the presence of the photo's 'having-been-there,' is strengthened, made even more unbearable."⁸⁸ All that the photograph can really tell us about Anja is essentially that it cannot tell us much about her at all. Spiegelman's avoidance in portraying his mother is his way of giving testimony to the traumatic, unassimilated memory of her. In fact, the only place where he depicts her without a mouse mask (disregarding the photography of her) in the entire narrative of *Maus* is on the last page of "Hell Planet". In this sequence, her movement towards his bed, in almost the exact same posture, with black, abyss like eyes, suggests a spectral visualization. A traumatic flashback of "the last time I saw her,"⁸⁹ a depiction of a person that is already dead.

"Hell Planet" is essentially Art Spiegelman's own trauma narrative – a place where he is able to articulate through text and image how unbearable it is to represent the unbearable. Although "Hell Planet" was drawn before *Maus* was nothing more than a three-page strip, the inclusion of this testimony illustrates the madness that Artie battles every day throughout *Maus*; the feeling of being insufficient and inadequate in trying to "reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams."⁹⁰ This feeling of insufficiency, of not being able to understand what *real* trouble feels like, is manifested in the literal and graphical representations of postmemory. Postmemory addresses the complex feeling of guilt and belated trauma that is intergenerational, a feeling impossible to comprehend while simultaneously impossible to remove oneself from. The few instances where postmemory is directly alluded to in *Maus* should consequently be seen as framing moments for why the narrative was created. Artie's personal testimony in "Hell Planet" works as both an example of a moment when the framework of the narrative in *Maus* is broken while simultaneously establishing why the narrative was created. The broken framework of *Maus* could therefore be seen as visual and textual allusions to postmemory – a self-reflexive method of framing the reasons behind *A Survivor's Tale*.

The reader's role as a listener of Spiegelman's testimony is especially important in relation to detecting the signs of postmemory within the narrative. Through *Maus* Spiegelman visually and textually relates to the reader how the Holocaust has destroyed, killed and dominated his family. Not just because his parents experienced it directly, but

⁸⁸ Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 32.

⁸⁹ Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*, 105.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

also because it has taken precedence over their lives ever since. This manifests in Artie who could only approach this effect by visually representing its presence in every stage of his life. *Maus* can thus, in similarity to “Hell Planet” be seen as therapeutic; it allowed Spiegelman to publicly testify to his struggle with the Holocaust in spite of the fact that he never experienced it directly. Even though Spiegelman has said, “. . . I am very resistant to the notion of my work being dismissed or understood as a therapeutic exercise, it is true that there is a kind of gestalting necessary just to be able to inhabit each character,”⁹¹ I would argue that this is, indeed, a part of the therapeutic process. By, in a sense, inhabiting his father, he comes closer to the way postmemory works and, consequently, how the Holocaust was bound to affect him, in the same way as the memories of it haunted Anja and Vladek.

This is directly linked to the way *Maus* is narrated; postmemory has affected Spiegelman in such a fundamental way that the testimony had to contain his own childhood, his own experiences from growing up with survivor parents. Vladek’s testimony could not simply remain *his* testimony; Spiegelman’s testimony-within-a-testimony, “Hell Planet”, and the prologue to *Maus*, to mention two examples, attests to the intricate effect his parents’ experiences from WWII had on him. Spiegelman’s role as a listener to Vladek’s testimony did not permit him to remain silent. In fact, in line with Laub’s assertion that the “listener . . . will experience hazards and struggles of his own, while carrying out his function of a witness to the trauma witness,”⁹² Spiegelman used his father’s testimony to address his own hazards and struggles. Furthermore, the graphic narrative medium seems to work well as a multi-layered testimony; the presence of postmemory is seamlessly interwoven in the co-mix of the graphic and the textual narrative allowing two different testimonies to combine into one interchangeable testimony.

⁹¹ Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, 35.

⁹² Laub, *Testimony*, 58.

Chapter 2: The Affective Response

In her essay “Autographics: the seeing ‘I’ of the comics” Gillian Whitlock discusses the complicated vocabulary and grammar of comics. She argues, in line with Scott McCloud’s discussion of closure in *Understanding Comics*, that comics puts readers under severe pressure when it comes to creating meaning in the narrative: “This grammar makes extraordinary demands on the reader to produce closure. . . . The work of closure draws the passive “looker” into the engagement (and demands) of reading.”⁹³ Whitlock’s argument stems from the idea that the reader becomes more easily involved in narratives that require its reader to fill in the gaps of a text. As gaps are a fundamental part of graphic narratives, this idea becomes especially applicable to the comics medium. McCloud has coined the term “closure” to describe how readers of graphic narratives create meaning in the gutters of panels (“the gutter” is the space between the panels in a comic). Although panel transitions are a vital part of how comics communicate meaning to the reader, few critics have explored how graphic narrative artists use different types of panel transitions to employ meaning to their works. A discussion of this particular topic can illuminate how the artist of a graphic narrative can navigate the reader’s involvement and, in turn, his or her realization of the narrative.

This discussion could also help to show how a graphic narrative can communicate the author’s testimony. In fact, if panel transitions can help to navigate reader involvement, then it may be plausible to assume that transitions in graphic narratives may be one reason why these types of narratives can be particularly useful to communicate testimony. By forcing the reader to actively make connections between text and image (that may inherently seem to lack an immediate connection), and by further requiring the reader to employ a deductive reading of the panel-to-panel transitions (this type of transition will be explained) in the narrative, the reader is, arguably, brought closer into the story.⁹⁴ In this chapter I will discuss Bechdel’s use of closure in *Fun Home*. I will address how closure engages the reader in a particular manner and how this may help to establish *Fun Home* as a testimonial narrative. There are several other aspects than panel transitions that requires reader involvement in *Fun Home*: Bechdel’s seemingly “cool aesthetic distance,”⁹⁵ presented through the

⁹³ Gillian Whitlock, “Autographics: The Seeing ‘I’ of The Comics,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, 4 (2006): 976, doi: 10.1353/mfs.2007.0013.

⁹⁴ This argument first came up in a seminar called “The Auto-Graphic Novel” during Hilde Jørgensen’s presentation of *Fun Home*.

⁹⁵ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 67.

emotionally and narratively distanced frame-narrator in Bechdel's memoir is, as I will argue, done deliberately in order to give room for the reader to become a listener of her testimony. Furthermore, the reader is given much responsibility for understanding the underlying meaning of intertextual references in the graphic memoir. I believe these particular artistic techniques give *Fun Home* a unique position in terms of testimonial narrative within the graphic memoir genre. Based on the reviews *Fun Home* has received on Amazon, it seems that people's praise of *Fun Home* is, in fact, linked with its ability to produce an emotional response in the reader. It is my belief that this response is connected to the way Bechdel tells her testimony; the extreme use of closure is an invitation for close reader involvement, and in turn, an invitation for the reader to be an emotionally invested listener of testimony.

The Graphic Testimony of *Fun Home* – the Closed Narrative

A testimony will, because of its content, bear marks of being fragmented. As Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman write in the introduction to *Testimony*, “testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance”⁹⁶ Consequently, fragmentary recollections and unsettled memories are what often constitute testimony; this provides the graphic medium with a unique potential for presenting testimony. McCloud defines comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in *deliberate sequence*”⁹⁷, and although the deliberate sequence of graphic narratives suggests a structure to the entire narrative, the reader must create connections between fragmented panels in order for meaning to emerge. The internal grammar of comics, closely related to McCloud's discussion of the gutter, has an immediate relation to the reader's responsibility to create and interpret meaning in a narrative. A point McCloud also makes in *Understanding Comics*, “Here in the *limbo* of the gutter, *human imagination* takes two separate images and *transforms* them into a single idea.”⁹⁸ The reader's responsibility of taking two or more panels and giving them a connection, a sequential meaning, gives the comics medium a unique position in relation to reader involvement. A skillful graphic artist can mimic one of the most basic symptoms of trauma, that of having fragmented memories from traumatic incidents, as a part of the narrative

⁹⁶ Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, 5.

⁹⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

structure. The reader's act of committing closure in the text can thus be guided by the artist's particular use of closure, and in turn, work as a way of allowing the reader to become a listener of testimony.

In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud lists six different types of panel transitions that require varying degree of reader involvement. In other words, they require varying levels of closure applied to them in order for the reader to see a connection between the transitions. Moment-to-moment transitions, as the name would suggest, requires minimal reader involvement and is narratively speaking very straightforward. However, when action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect and non-sequitur transitions occur, the reader is challenged as an interpreter of meaning.⁹⁹ These transitions also require varying degrees of involvement, however they all share one essential feature: the narrative is created by the reader's ability to create closure in the gutters of the panels. While moment-to-moment transitions show panels where everything happens in the panels, all the others panel transitions have a large part of their meaning created in the gutters of the panels.¹⁰⁰

McCloud has pointed out that in American and European comics there are especially two types of panel transitions that dominate: A2A and SUB2SUB. This is not limited to mainstream comics such as *X-Men*, *Donald Duck* or *Asterix*, but also to narratives such as *Maus* and *A Contract with God*. Interestingly, *Fun Home* differentiates itself from other Western graphic narratives here. In Bechdel's graphic memoir, the panel-to-panel transitions are dominated by S2S transitions. McCloud has suggested that these types of transitions require "*deductive reasoning*". As he claims, S2S will often "transport us across *significant distances of time and space*."¹⁰¹ This definition of S2S transitions can easily be seen in relation to how a trauma victim gives testimony. Panel transitions that take the reader across a long distance in time and space may initially seem fragmentary; similarly, the initial testimony of trauma victims often, as Laub argues in *Testimony*, "begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence."¹⁰² The distance created in the gutters of S2S transitions can, thus, be seen as symptomatic for the way trauma affects a person, and

⁹⁹ Action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene and aspect-to-aspect transitions will, from now on, be referred to as: A2A, SUB2SUB, S2S and ASP2ASP transitions.

¹⁰⁰ See *Understanding Comics* page 70-72 for a more elaborate explanation of the different transitions.

¹⁰¹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 71.

¹⁰² Laub, *Testimony*, 57.

the subsequent way that a testimony is given; the experiences will often be episodic and fractured, and rightly then, S2S transitions allow the graphic medium, and more specifically Bechdel and *Fun Home*, to communicate this feeling to the listener of the narrative.

Laub's claim that, "bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener,"¹⁰³ does, in turn, rightly emphasize the reader's role with regards to *Fun Home*. He suggests that the listener of testimony must engage in the narrative in order for the narrative to, in fact, work as a testimonial narrative. S2S transitions do not only allow interpretations, they require them. Thus, by employing a deductive reading of the sequential narrative in a graphic testimony such as *Fun Home*, the reader is opening up a space where one is reliving the trauma.

Isaac Butler has, in his blog *Parabasis*, made a graph showing the percentage of different panel-to-panel transitions in *Fun Home*.¹⁰⁴ The result is interesting: close to 60 % of all of the panel-to-panel transitions in *Fun Home* are, according to Butler's graph, S2S transitions, while around 18 % are A2A and 23 % are SUB2SUB transitions. The percentage use of S2S transitions and A2A transitions are in *Fun Home* inverted as opposed to traditional transitions in Western comics (although it varies, A2A normally accounts for 60 % or more, while S2S are only used in 15 % or less of the panel transitions).¹⁰⁵ When S2S transitions are used it is the artist's task of making the transitions understandable to the reader; there must be a red thread, or the panels may be interpreted as non-sequiturs. In fact, Bechdel commented on Butler's blog entry stating, "I'm glad you didn't find any non sequiturs!"¹⁰⁶ Non-sequiturs would imply a lack of cohesiveness, which would be devastating (although perhaps symptomatic for trauma, however, this is clearly not Bechdel's narrative style) for the narrative control Bechdel has applied to *Fun Home*. In spite of there not being any non-sequiturs in the narrative, it seems very interesting to note how Bechdel can get away with almost 60 % S2S transitions without losing the reader's ability to commit closure in the gutters of the panel transitions. The key to this lies in the frame-narrator's commentary narrative

¹⁰³ Laub, *Testimony*, 70.

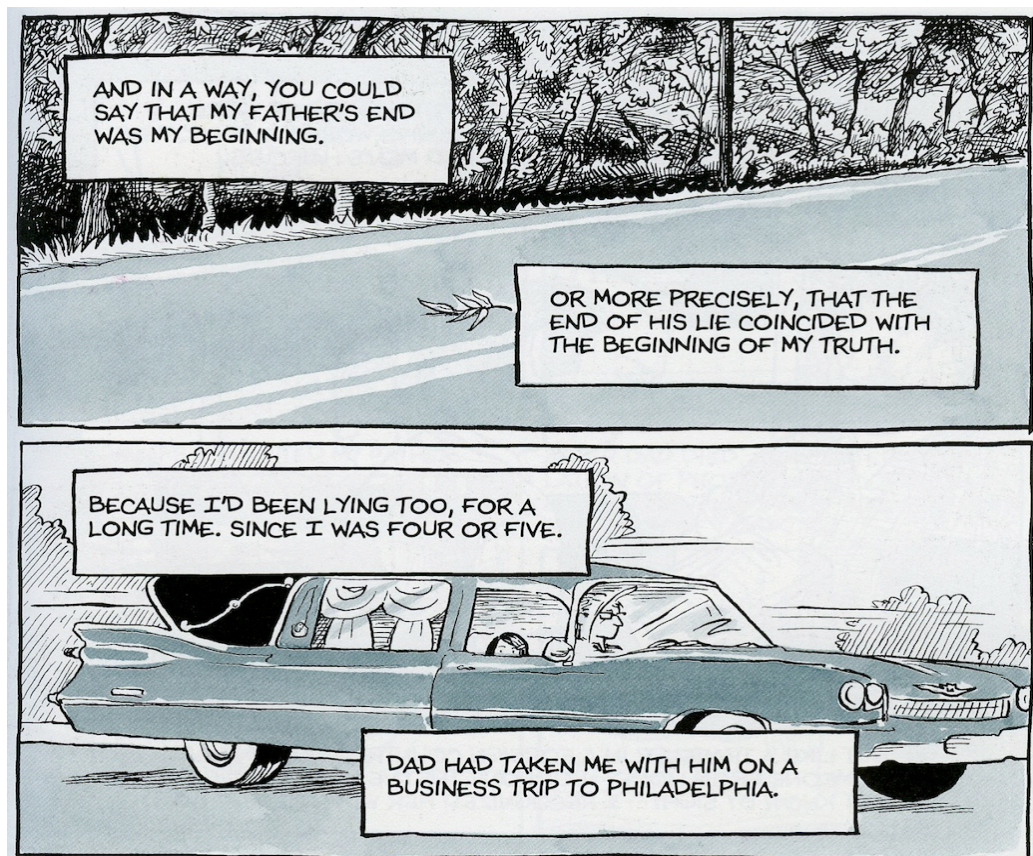
¹⁰⁴ Isaac Butler, "Panel Transitions in Fun Home," *Parabasis* (blog) entry posted April 29, 2011, accessed November 14, 2011, <http://parabasis.typepad.com/blog/2011/04/so-this-might-be-a-bit-into-the-tall-weeds-here-but-today-in-prep-for-teaching-fun-home-i-did-a-panel-transition-analysis.html>.

¹⁰⁵ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 75.

¹⁰⁶ Alison Bechdel, comment on "Panel Transitions in Fun Home," *Parabasis* (blog), comment posted May 4, 2011, accessed November 10, 2011, <http://parabasis.typepad.com/blog/2011/04/so-this-might-be-a-bit-into-the-tall-weeds-here-but-today-in-prep-for-teaching-fun-home-i-did-a-panel-transition-analysis.html>.

outside, or strictly framed boxes on the inside of the panels. This furthermore strains the responsibility of the reader, who must create the connection between the frame-narrator's comments *and* the visual parts of the panel(s). Making this connection implicates the reader further in the graphic testimony; the reader must engage with the narrative in a way that bears resemblance to Laub's discussion on how bearing witness to trauma includes a listener.

The sequence taking place in the two panels below is a typical example of a S2S transition; the reader is shown a juxtaposition of Alison's sexuality with Bruce's suicide. Furthermore, the end of his life in secrecy is established as the beginning of her open life as a lesbian. All this is pointed out by the frame-narrator's commentary boxes, linking the panel's depiction of a single branch on the road (the closest graphic presentation the reader receives of Bruce's moment of death) to a trip Alison and Bruce had while she was four or five years old.

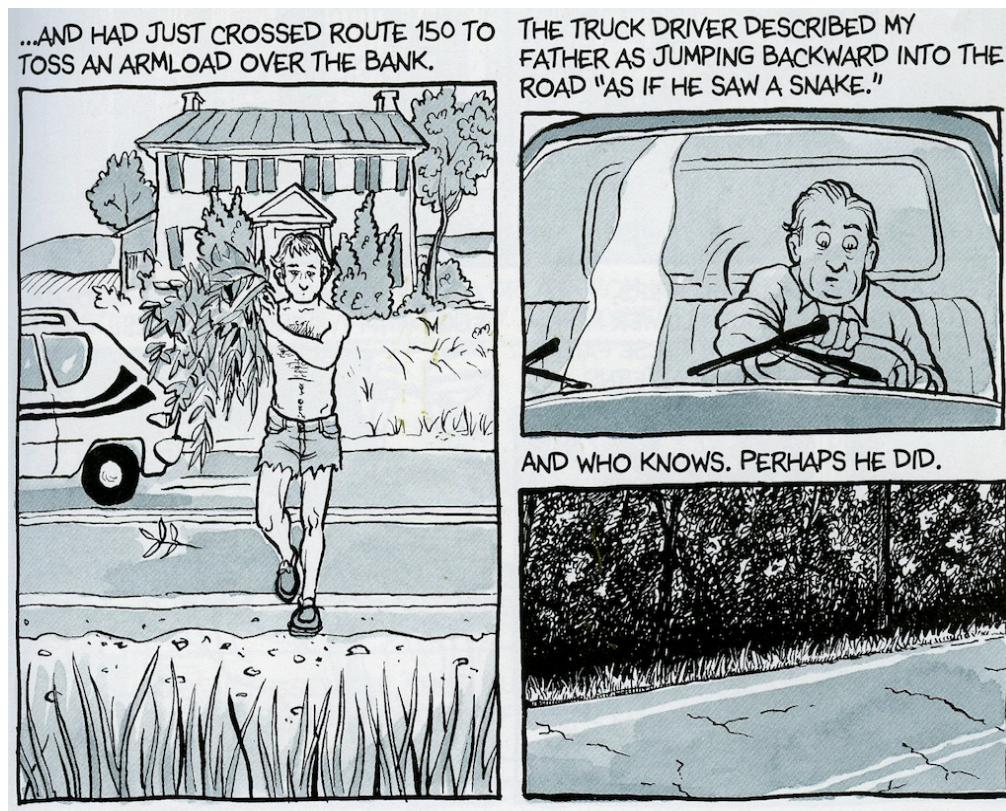


Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 1 and 2, 117.

This example is just one of numerous S2S transitions where the frame-narrator entwines what may seem like unrelated graphic images into a juxtaposition of Alison and Bruce's identity and sexuality. The insistent parting from and simultaneous return to Bruce

(made possible by S2S transitions) in the narrative suggests his importance as an influence throughout Alison's childhood; moreover it suggests the huge influence his closeted sexuality has had on Alison, and, in turn, how her traumatic childhood is explicitly linked to her father.

In a similar manner, the three-panel sequence below illustrates how one of the central traumatic memories from Bechdel's adolescent years is approximated in the narrative. The sequence and questions around her father's alleged suicide are returned to, as illustrated in the previous example, on several other occasions in the narrative as well. This insistent return to Bruce's suicide echoes Cathy Caruth's statement: "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event."¹⁰⁷ Nowhere in the narrative is the exact moment of impact between Bruce and the truck visualized, affirming what Ann Cvetkovich has also stated: "In a literal sense, his death is an event without a witness . . . the moment of her father's death is arguably the 'unrepresentable' trauma to which the text insistently returns . . ."¹⁰⁸



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 2,3 and 4, 89.

¹⁰⁷ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36,1-2 (2008): 112, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wsqr/summary/v036/36.1-2.cvetkovich.html>.

Although Bruce's actual moment of death is not visualized in *Fun Home* it seems clear that the reader is, in a sense, visualizing his death in the gutters of these panels. In panel two on page 89, Bruce is crossing the road, then, in panel three, we see the driver making a sharp turn to the left, clearly trying to avoid hitting Bruce, and, in panel four, we see the edge of the road where Bruce was hit. The gutter between panels three and four is the crucial moment when Bruce is hit by the truck (created by the reader's act of closure). Closure allows the reader to become what McCloud has called a "*silent accomplice*,"¹⁰⁹ in the process of performing a deductive reading in the graphic narrative. This interaction between the reader and the narrative concretizes Laub's argument concerning the act of giving testimony: "The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time."¹¹⁰ Closure's fundamental role in graphic narratives requires a close reader involvement in order for the narrative to be communicated. This allows the visual and the textual testimony of *Fun Home* to interact with the reader in a way that makes the reader a witness to the testimony as it is given; we become a blank screen where the trauma is projected.

One of the central aspects of how trauma works is the way in which the witness is not really in contact with the essence of the traumatic event, nor really knowledgeable of how it has effected the memories from the incident(s). Thus the survivor remains trapped in an event that is not completed.¹¹¹ In order to "undo this entrapment" it is vital that "a therapeutic process—a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of *re-externalizing the event* . . . ,"¹¹² is performed. Bechdel's insistent, but fragmentary return to her father in the narrative of *Fun Home* is not only a "process of constructing a narrative," it also seems to be a clue to the origin of her trauma. In fact, it has traits similar to the structure of Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*. The film is built around testimonies of different survivors of the Holocaust, and it is, as Shoshana Felman has written, "A fragmentation of the testimonies—a fragmentation of both the tongues and of perspectives—that cannot ultimately be surpassed. . . . this

¹⁰⁹ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 68.

¹¹⁰ Laub, *Testimony*, 57.

¹¹¹ Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, 69.

¹¹² Ibid. *Re-externalizing* was corrected by me to *re-externalizing*.

fragmentation of the testimonies, which enacts the fragmentation of the witnessing.”¹¹³ Similarly, *Fun Home*’s S2S transitions mimic the dispersed reappearance of memories, a fragmentation of memory itself, testifying through its narrative structure the traumatic nature of Alison’s childhood. By requiring the reader to perform and apply closure to the S2S transitions and the meaning between the frame-narrator’s comments and the panels, the narrative appears as simultaneously fragmented while still being communicative.

The link between the frame-narrator’s commentary and the graphic aspects of the panel is at its most interesting in the centerfold page of the narrative.¹¹⁴ The bleeding centerfold photograph that appears in *Fun Home* works as an excellent example of the complex duality of the testimony; while attesting to her own trauma, Bechdel also relates to her thoughts on her father’s difficult life, the way he “juggled his public appearance and private reality”.¹¹⁵ The frame-narrator’s comments are disturbingly free of condemnation; the lack of a negative response to the secret photograph is articulated by the frame-narrator: “In fact, the picture is beautiful. But would I be assessing its aesthetic merits so calmly if it were of a seventeen-year-old girl? Why am I not properly outraged?”¹¹⁶ The reader, who is included in the panel through the hand holding the photograph (which becomes a multilayered representation of the reader, Alison, Bechdel and Bruce’s hand)¹¹⁷, must identify this act of witnessing as a communication of how not only Alison’s own traumatic childhood is visualized in the narrative, but also Bruce’s. The reader becomes a witness to the act of witnessing, and it is therefore vital to note the frame-narrator’s commentary. The importance of the centerfold is centralized by the immediate connection Bechdel feels to it. It becomes a testimony, again similar to what Lanzmann attempted to capture with *Shoah*: “*Shoah* embodies the capacity of art not simply to witness but to *take the witness stand*: the film takes responsibility for its times by enacting the significance of our era as an *age of testimony*, an age in which witnessing itself has undergone a major trauma.”¹¹⁸ When the frame-narrator notes that, “Perhaps I identify too well with my father’s illicit

¹¹³ Felman, *Testimony*, 223.

¹¹⁴ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 100-101.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹⁷ Rebecca Sheer, “Queering the Family Album: the Re-orientation of Things in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*,” in *Forum for World Literature Studies* 3, 1 (2011): 46 -47.

¹¹⁸ Felman, *Testimony*, 206.

awe,”¹¹⁹ she addresses her own act of witnessing, moreover, she points out how witnessing the photograph taken by Bruce actually creates a closer bond between herself and her father, despite the problematic nature of the photograph’s focal point.

Partly what constitutes Alison’s trauma has to do with what she did not know about her father during her childhood, her observations and experience of a silenced, isolated, repressed and tense everyday life. When Bechdel, after Bruce’s death, discovered the photograph of Roy it actually evoked the entire narrative.¹²⁰ Similarly to how Marcel Proust evokes involuntarily memory through dipping madeleine cake in tea in *In Search of Lost Time*, Bechdel’s testimony spawns from this single, centerfold photograph that invites the reader into Bechdel’s experience in the narrative through a clever use of a multilayered hand bleeding off the page. The hand includes the reader in a direct way allowing “the testimonial process to take place,” a person who can be, “the intimate and total presence of an *other*,”¹²¹ someone who can read the testimony of a narrative dominated by fragmented S2S transitions and an emotionally distant frame-narrator. The drawing of hands holding objects inside the narrative also occurs in the other graphic memoirs, a point briefly established in the introduction.

The frame-narrator’s narrative style is, additionally, also connected to the way in which the reader receives the story. Apart from the obvious transmission of information that occurs when the reader reads the frame-narrator’s comments, her tone, narrative style, and lack of emotional investment also invites the reader to assume the role as a listener of testimony. Due to the extremely personal nature of *Fun Home*’s testimony (more so than the bilateral public/personal testimonies of *Maus* and *Waltz with Bashir*) one would initially be expecting a more emotional rendering of the traumatic moments in Bechdel’s adolescent life. However, similarly to how *Fun Home*’s panel transitions are unorthodox from a Western-comics standpoint, so is her narrative style. In order to communicate her traumatic upbringing she distances herself from the story: “For years after my father’s death, when the subject of parents came up in conversation I would relate the information in a flat, matter-of-fact tone... eager to detect in my listener the flinch of grief that eluded me.”¹²² This flat, matter-of-fact tone is reproduced by the frame-narrator in *Fun Home*, for example in the voice that describes the panel of Bruce

¹¹⁹ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 101.

¹²⁰ Hillary Chute and Alison Bechdel, “An Interview with Alison Bechdel,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, 4 (2006): 1004-1013, doi: 10.1353/mfs.2007.0003.

¹²¹ Laub, *Testimony*, 70.

¹²² Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 45.

showing Alison and her brothers the corpse of a distant relative at the same age as Alison (ten at the time): “Dad explained that he had died from a broken neck. His skin was gray, which gave his bright blond crewcut the effect of yellow tint on a black-and-white photograph.”¹²³ The lack of emotion in the frame-narrator’s retelling of this incident may not employ feelings in the reader’s mind, however, it seems clear that it attempts to evoke them. The frame-narrator’s comment from page 45 of *Fun Home* seems to work as a meta-commentary on the entire narrative; the matter-of-factness in the retelling of her childhood trauma is not an emotionless testimony; it is a testimony to how her lack of an emotional response *is* her emotional response. Interestingly, the emotionally distanced frame-narrator is furthermore linked to a more complicated distance in the graphic narrative that originates from Bechdel’s process of creating comics.

The creative process of making a graphic memoir, as with the creation of a comic, can vary greatly from artist to artist. Some works are cooperatively created through a joint process of an artist and a writer, other works are created by one single artist who will, in a mixed process of writing and drawing come to a finalized version of a page. In order for a testimonial narrative to communicate the personal nature of traumatic experiences it seems vital that the artist and the writer are, in fact, the same person. Nonetheless, even though this is the case in *Fun Home* and partly in *Maus*, the chapter on *Waltz with Bashir* will reveal that other methods can also be used.

In a YouTube video Bechdel explains the process of which she used to create *Fun Home*.¹²⁴ This process is quite unique for its medium. Bechdel would start off each page by writing in Adobe Illustrator, creating panel outlines and, in turn, the commentary boxes of the frame-narrator’s voice. She would then, as she says in the video, be “thinking visually about how these scenes were breaking down, thinking what I was gonna draw in these panels, as I wrote. Without having to do any drawing.”¹²⁵ This creative process is interesting on several levels; it explains how Robyn Warhol has found at least three diegetic voices in the narrative of *Fun Home*: the frame-narrator’s voice (extradiegetic), the dialogue presented within the panel (intradiegetic) and the

¹²³ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 148.

¹²⁴ Alison Bechdel, “Creating *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*,” YouTube, accessed November 15, 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cumLU3UpcGY>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:16-25.

graphic voice which is the visual narrative itself.¹²⁶ Furthermore it points to the artificiality of the whole narrative (which is even further established by Bechdel's explicit mention of how she posed for every character in the memoir); additionally it explicitly points out the huge gap between the textual and the visual narrative of *Fun Home*. It is the latter point that is most interesting in the context of my particular focus on the role closure plays in relation to *Fun Home*'s realization as a testimonial narrative.

In *Understanding Comics* McCloud points out that "Comics panels *fracture* both *time* and *space*, offering a *jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments*. But closure allows us to *connect* these moments and *mentally construct a continuous, unified reality*."¹²⁷ McCloud's discussion of closure in comics is mostly limited to the type of closure that the reader commits when he or she connects adjacent panels. However, it seems that the narrative flow of *Fun Home* is far from limited to the way panel transitions work. Additionally, the reader has to connect the frame-narrator's commentary, the extradiegetic voice, to their respective panels; this process, which seems to, at times, require just as much imagination as the act of closure in the gutters of panels, further challenges and requires the reader to work as an accomplice in order for the narrative to reach its communicative purpose.

The opening passage of *Fun Home* connects the game of airplane to the fate of the mythical character of Icarus. However, as the frame-narrator notes, it is not the falling Alison who we see in the panel that was to "plummet from the sky,"¹²⁸ but rather Bruce. The frame-narrator's commentary, as can be seen in the panel on the next page, does not describe the actual event that is taking place within the panel. Rather, it describes, metaphorically, the fate of Bruce, inverted in the graphical presentation through the visualization of Alison falling. In order to understand the connection between Icarus, Daedalus, the mythic relationship, and Alison and Bruce the reader must not only be familiar with Greek mythology, he or she must also be able to see how these two relationships are connected to each other; this is not limited to their connection within the narrative, but also how and why the author makes this particular connection. The latter question can be seen in relation to how traumatic moments in Chapter One are described through the frame-narrator's particular use of the Icarus-

¹²⁶ Robyn Warhol, "The Space Between: A Narrative Approach to Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*," *College Literature* 38, 3 (2011): 5.

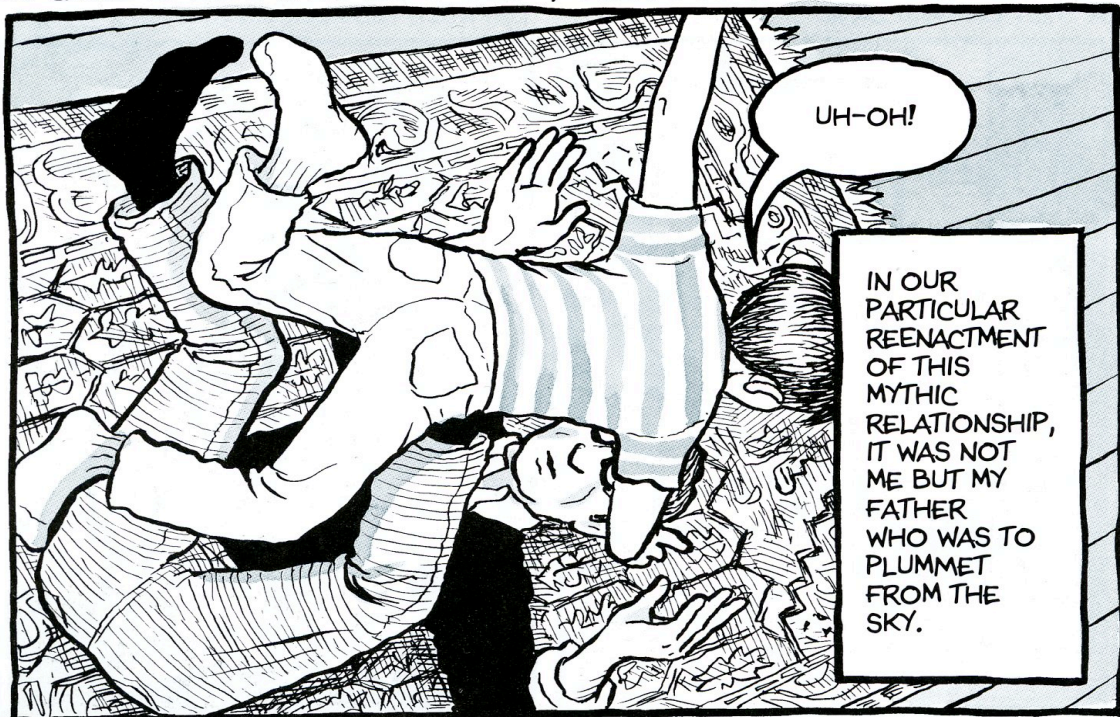
http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/college_literature/v038/38.3.warhol.html.

¹²⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 67.

¹²⁸ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 4.

Daedalus / Alison-Bruce dichotomy: “Daedalus, too, was indifferent to the human cost of his projects.” and “Indeed, the result of that scheme—a half-bull, half-man monster—inspired Daedalus’s greatest creation yet. He hid the minotaur in the labyrinth—a maze of passages and rooms opening endlessly into one another.. and from which, as stray youths and maidens discovered to their peril... escape was impossible.”¹²⁹ An interesting note to make here, and an issue that will be dealt with more in-depth in the chapter on *Waltz with Bashir*, is the concept of dissociation. For while the frame-narrator speaks metaphorically of how Alison remains trapped within the maze that is the Bechdel home, the visual aspects of the narrative shows that she, in fact, does leave the house. This should first of all be seen as a way of describing how Alison remains mentally imprisoned in the Bechdel home, but additionally also an example of how the distance between the frame-narrator’s commentary and the visual depiction can be seen as a dissociative way of dealing with a traumatic experience; a defensive mechanism to the traumatic nature of the event.

CONSIDERING THE FATE OF ICARUS AFTER HE FLOUTED HIS FATHER'S ADVICE AND FLEW SO CLOSE TO THE SUN HIS WINGS MELTED, PERHAPS SOME DARK HUMOR IS INTENDED.



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 1, 4.

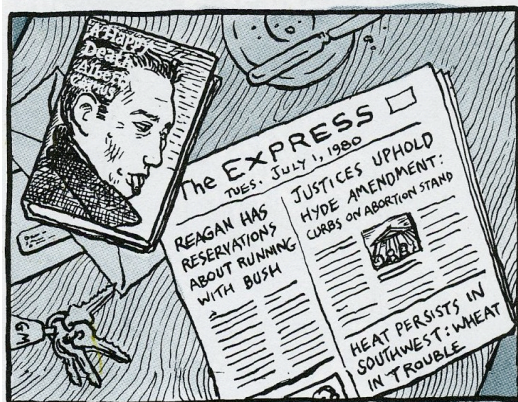
¹²⁹ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 11-12.

The references to Greek mythology allow Bechdel to operate and communicate traumatic moments in the narrative while keeping a certain distance to the reality of the events. This distance is furthermore established through the unconnectedness of the frame-narrator's remarks and the visual depictions in the panels. Consequently, in order for the frame-narrator's commentary to make sense in relation to the visual narrative the reader must be, and is, put under severe pressure. The narrative requires the reader to understand how the frame-narrator's commentary is an important aspect of how Bechdel can give her testimony; when the visual part of the panel can not suffice to communicate how the event(s) affected her, Bechdel uses tools such as the frame-narrator's commentary and literary allusions to guide the reader to their inherent meaning; a communication of difficult events that are weighted by a "laden experience".¹³⁰

This means that it is not only the S2S transitions that require closure in *Fun Home*; the extradiegetic voice of the frame-narrator is often in need of a deductive reading in order to create closure between text and image. This extradiegetic voice must, however, in spite of its inherit distance from the visual narrative, be seen in close relation to it. It is the reader's task to connect and commit closure between the frame-narrator's commentary and the visual depictions in the panels of the narrative. For while

Bechdel painstakingly produces much factual, historical evidence from her childhood:

THE COPY OF CAMUS' *A HAPPY DEATH* THAT HE'D BEEN READING AND LEAVING AROUND THE HOUSE IN WHAT MIGHT BE CONSTRUED AS A DELIBERATE MANNER.



diary entries, dictionary notes, citations from books, photographs and passports, it seems clear that these historical artifacts are only fragmented memories from a long gone past. To make her visual reproductions of these objects meaningful, both to herself and to the reader, the frame-narrator must give some form of explanation of the visual depiction. The panel to the left shows *A Happy Death* by Camus, with the frame-narrator's commentary pointing out its possible deliberate presence. A purely visual panel without the frame-narrator's voice would have

Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 5, 27.

left the Camus book quite ambiguous. However, with the help of the frame-narrator the

¹³⁰ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 143.

book becomes a part of Bechdel's testimony; a visualization of her confrontation with and discussion of one possible clue as to what happened to Bruce. Hillary Chute has claimed that "*Fun Home* is not a book about 'what happened' to Bechdel's father. Rather, it is a book about ideas about what happened to Bruce Bechdel, and arriving at a collection of ideas through an intense engagement with archival materials."¹³¹ When the frame-narrator says, "The copy of Camus' *A Happy Death* that he'd been reading and leaving around the house in what might be construed as a deliberate manner,"¹³² it seems clear that she is referring to a possible fact, a connection that is made by the reader in an act of closure. The reader is shown, "the presence of ample documents, of searing artifacts and of fragmentary memoirs of anguish".¹³³ The presentations of these objects and their connection to traumatic moments become a testimony, a connection essentially created by the reader in a mix of visual and verbal acts of closure. The reader "... comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has yet to be made."¹³⁴ This gives the reader an important role in the narrative; through *Fun Home*'s extensive need of closure to fill its gutters, the reader helps Bechdel fill in what has yet to be witnessed.

The frame-narrator's commentary also allows the reader to review and re-enter already established moments in the narrative. This does not only anchor certain moments as especially important and traumatic (through its repetition in the narrative), it also requires the reader to rethink and question Bechdel's entire project. Chute's assertion that *Fun Home* is a book about ideas of what happened to Bruce is only partially true; *Fun Home* is a book about re-working memories, of revisiting painful, important memories to the point that *truth* can only be partially established. The constant return to Bruce's alleged suicide reinforces its dominance in the narrative; however, the unknown aspects of it, its unrepresentability, requires the reader's engagement in order for it to become assimilated. It is only through the reader's acts of closure that Bechdel's testimonial narrative can come to a conclusion.

In line with her particular focus on the similarities and differences between herself and her father, Bechdel does not only bend the truthfulness of her testimonial

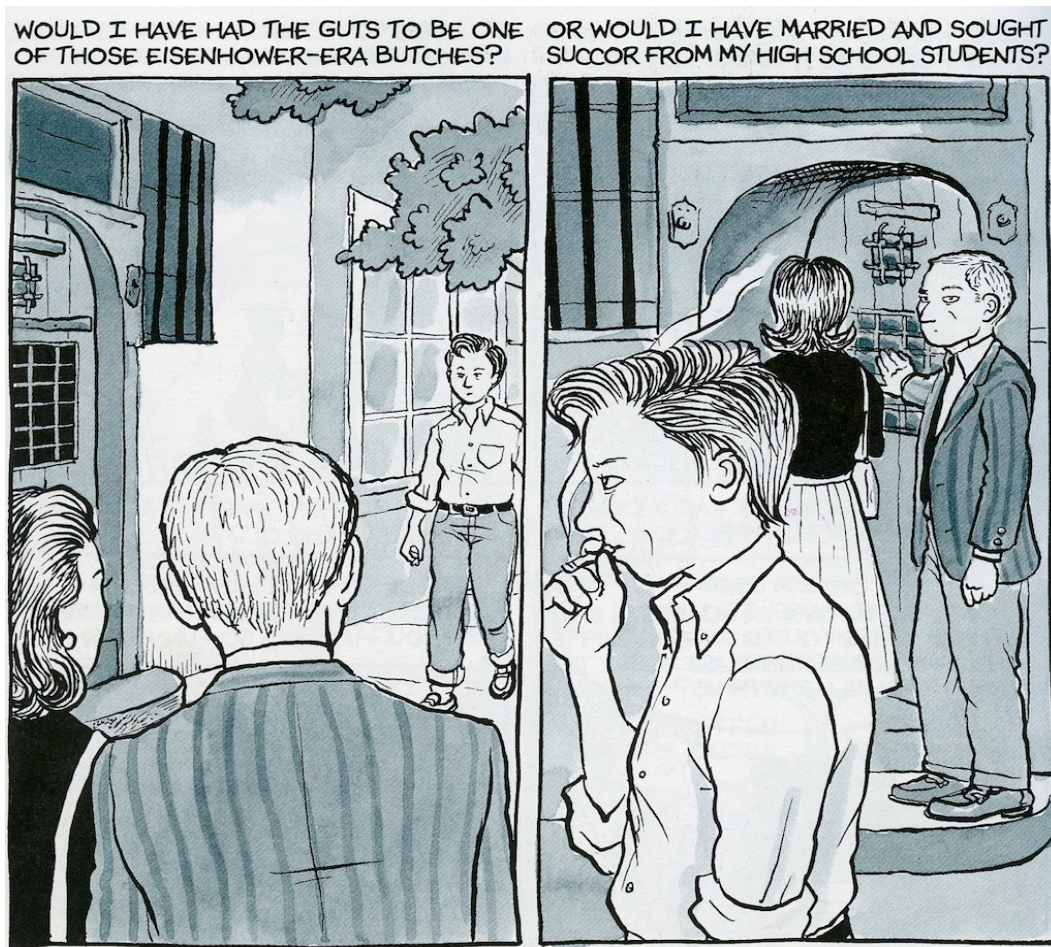
¹³¹ Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 180.

¹³² Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 27.

¹³³ Laub, *Testimony*, 57.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

narrative, she also attempts to question what she would have done growing up in her father's days, and not her own.



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 1 and 2, 108.

In a moment of fictional retrospective commentary the frame-narrator asks, “Would I have had the guts to be one of those Eisenhower-era butches? Or would I have married and sought succor from my high school students?”¹³⁵ The juxtaposition of Alison and Bruce becomes explicitly clear to the reader through the two panels accompanying the frame-narrator’s commentary. A butch, fictional Alison walks towards Helen and Bruce during their college years in the first panel. The second panel shows Bruce holding the door into the local pub for Helen, while enviously peering towards the passing Alison. The graphical presentation of the frame-narrator’s questions may be strictly fictional, however, the qualms that surface here, are as real as it gets. It is precisely here that graphic narratives venture into unforeseen (written) territories, a place where fictionality

¹³⁵ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 108.

meets reality. The reader (listener) “must know all this and more,”¹³⁶ he must see beyond the black and white dichotomy of truth/fiction to understand that the graphic visualization is an intricate part of Bechdel’s testimony. Clearly, the reader’s act of committing closure happens not only in panel transitions, but also in the relationship between the frame-narrator’s textual commentary and the visual presentation of the testimony. It is the reader’s ability to commit closure that permits these two different communicative levels to operate in an interwoven relationship, and which, in turn, will allow Bechdel’s testimony to achieve its communicative purpose.

The Literary Testimony

Fun Home is by most readers seen as a very “bookish” graphic memoir.¹³⁷ The memoir alludes, both directly and indirectly, to a number of different literary works, ranging from Homer’s *Odyssey* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* to Colette’s *Earthly Paradise* and Benjamin Spock’s *Baby and Child Care*. The extensive use of literary allusions in *Fun Home* indicates yet another distancing device between the traumatic events and the frame-narrator’s mediation of them. Literary allusions allow Bechdel to pinpoint two important notions in relation to her testimony; first that her use of these allusions are not only descriptive in terms of characters, it also testifies to the way that she thinks. Literary allusions are consequently prerequisites for the testimony to take place. Secondly, literary allusions allow Bechdel to challenge truthfulness in any form of remembered representation. Similarly to how Art Spiegelman uses his anthropomorphic metaphor, and Ari Folman and David Polonsky use different color schemes to separate factual and factical occurrences (this will be returned to in the chapter on *Waltz with Bashir*), Bechdel uses literary allusions to complicate any notion of *the* truth in her testimony. Cvetkovich has also noted the correlation between Bechdel’s use of different tools of construing the truth and Spiegelman’s use of cats and mice in *Maus* to reconfigure “the relation between the visual and the truthful, demonstrating in visual form testimony’s power to provide forms of truth that are emotional rather than factual.”¹³⁸ This is, at the very core of what constitutes testimonial narratives, as testimony is a personal, therapeutic process that approaches especially difficult event(s) and the associated experiences that go with them, and should therefore not be limited to

¹³⁶ Laub, *Testimony*, 58.

¹³⁷ Michael Moon, “Gutter Geek the discontinuous review of graphic narrative,” accessed October 5, 2011. <http://guttergeek.com/2006/September2006/funhome/funhome.html>.

¹³⁸ Cvetkovich, “Drawing the archive,” 113-114.

the truth of what happened, but rather the truth of how it was experienced, or felt by the individual.

If one can accept that literary allusions are one of Bechdel's chief narrative tools for presenting her testimony, then it seems obvious that in order for the reader to become a listener of Bechdel's testimony, one must not only be able to commit closure and understand the purpose of the allusions, but also more generally understand why Bechdel uses literature so forcefully in *Fun Home*. Consequently, it seems clear that there is one prerequisite above any for the use of intertextual references in a literary work. In order for the allusion to function, the reader must be familiar with the origin of the reference. The connection between Marcel Proust's narrator in *In Search of Lost Time* and Bruce (both closeted homosexuals) will be lost on a person unfamiliar with Proust's work. Consequently, it is not without risk that Bechdel has chosen to use many intertextual references to describe her tendency to see similarities between fictional characters and situations and real life characters and situations throughout *Fun Home*. While it may be too much to ask from the reader that he or she should be able to understand every allusion in *Fun Home*, it seems vital that the reader can identify the reason behind Bechdel's use of them, to give her testimony her particular voice.

The intertextual allusions will not only be seen by the reader as a characterization of traits associated with Bruce, Helen or Alison, but additionally also as a way of using aesthetic distance to convey the feeling of distance, uncertainty and silence that Alison felt as a child. As the frame-narrator addresses on page 134 of *Fun Home*, "Our home was like an artists' colony. We ate together, but otherwise were absorbed in our separate pursuits. And in this isolation, our creativity took on an aspect of compulsion."¹³⁹ The obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) that Alison developed as a child is suggested to have grown out of this artistic isolation. In fact, Alison's behavior seem to fit well with studies done on childhood trauma and OCD, and how they are often co-existent: "A number of studies have similarly described the childhood onset of OCD after experiences of childhood abuse and neglect . . . People with OCD also tend to report significantly more childhood trauma than healthy comparison groups."¹⁴⁰ Consequently, Bechdel's use of intertextuality as a narrative tool in *Fun Home* has the double-function of both describing the people in Alison's childhood and

¹³⁹ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 134.

¹⁴⁰ Leanne Carpenter and Man Cheung Chung, "Childhood trauma in obsessive compulsive disorder: The roles of alexithymia and attachment," *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 84, 4 (2011, doi: 10.1111/j.2044-8341.2010.02003.x).

young adolescent life, and of being in itself a representation of the very distance that Alison felt as a child. Literary allusions are not only important as descriptive devices but also because the artistic distance enforced by intertextuality in the narrative allows the reader to feel the traumatic environment that was a large part of the Bechdel family.

The extensive use of literary allusions in *Fun Home* could be seen as an overarching repetition of something that is, on the one hand, profoundly important and pleasant to Bechdel, while simultaneously also being interchangeably connected to her traumatic childhood. As Whitehead argues in *Trauma Fiction*, “repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression.”¹⁴¹ However, repetitions are also clearly important for testimonies due to the fact that in order for the narrative to go beyond being a mirroring of what it is like to be traumatized, it seems vital to revisit the crucial moments that have left one traumatized. Repetitions allow the traumatized victim to approach certain key moments in order to start a healing process, a way of distancing without necessarily removing oneself completely from the events. LaCapra has used Freud’s differentiation between melancholia and mourning to work out his own terms in relation to the repetitions of trauma. Repetitions of trauma, can, in short, be distinguished between “acting-out” and “working-through”.¹⁴² “Acting-out” is the tendency traumatized people have of living in the past, of being unable to differentiate the now and the then. “Working-through”, on the other hand, has to do with being aware of the mechanisms behind one’s own reaction to the traumatic moments, of being aware of the aforementioned tendency of being unable to differentiate the now and the then, and consequently to address these patterns. LaCapra has, as Whitehead furthermore points out, argued that writing is in itself an act of working-through what has been experienced.¹⁴³ Consequently, it could be claimed that Bechdel’s use of repetition in *Fun Home* works as a curative process through its revisitation of traumatic events. However, as will be returned to, writing does not necessarily become a curative process, something of which Bechdel points out both within the graphic narrative and in her metatextual commentary.

Bechdel’s insistent return to literary allusions throughout the graphic narrative may in fact be seen as one of the central examples of working-through in *Fun Home*.

¹⁴¹ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2004), 86.

¹⁴² LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 183-187.

¹⁴³ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 87.

One particularly eye-opening moment that is deeply rooted in literary significance for Alison appears two times in the graphic memoir, and depicts the moment when she discovers that she is a lesbian. The discovery is connected to her reading of the book *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives*. The book is noted by the frame-narrator as something that changed her perception of herself in a “revelation not of the flesh, but of the mind.”¹⁴⁴ As the frame-narrator explains, it was precisely literature that was the origin of her discovery of her sexual preferences: “my realization at nineteen that I was a lesbian came about in a manner consistent with my bookish upbringing.”¹⁴⁵ The repeated visualization of this epiphanic moment in the graphic memoir contains some interesting graphical aspects in relation to Bechdel’s testimony. First of all, panel one on page 74, in similarity to the second panel on page 203, demonstrate the only instances where Bechdel has used a purely iconic language to communicate Alison’s feelings and/or thoughts.¹⁴⁶ The large exclamation point serves to illustrate her discovery of her sexuality, additionally, it also testifies to her uncertainty of this discovery.

Secondly, the shelves of the bookstore on page 74 display many unidentified books, a few, however, are highlighted. These books were all published in 1978-79, and can consequently be seen as tools for establishing the truthfulness of the occurrence of this particular scene. Furthermore, it should be reflected on why the particular books are selected; one title, in particular, seems to allude to a deeper meaning: Umberto Eco’s book *The Role of the Reader*. It seems very plausible that Bechdel here asks the reader to pay close attention in the narrative, as an invested reader and listener of testimony one is, in the panels of page 74 and 203, a witness to something that could not have happened. On page 74 there is a silhouette of a person with curly hair; a tentative reader will easily recognize the similarity between the silhouette and Roy, the boy that was together with Bruce, Alison and her brothers on their trip to the Jersey shore. When Bechdel makes us revisit this episode on page 203, the panels below show how the silhouette of Roy is further established in the second panel. Furthermore, in the third panel the silhouette of Bruce appears.

¹⁴⁴ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 74.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See McCloud *Understanding Comics* page 27 for further elaboration on his use of the word iconic.



AND INDEED, I EMBARKED THAT DAY ON AN ODYSSEY WHICH, CONSISTING AS IT DID IN A GRADUAL, EPISODIC, AND INEVITABLE CONVERGENCE WITH MY ABSTRACTED FATHER, WAS VERY NEARLY AS EPIC AS THE ORIGINAL.



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 2 and 3, 203.

The reader knows that he could not have possibly been in that bookshop at the moment Alison made her discovery; it seems clear that his presence (in similarity to Roy's presence) is a purely symbolic allusion. The subtlety of this symbolic allusion could hardly have been created in any other literary medium than the graphic narrative. It rightly emphasizes a correlation between Alison and Bruce, rooted deeply in the core of the work, a shared fate and connection. Roy and Bruce's presence is an allusion to the intricate relationship between Alison and Bruce, a convergence of a shared, traumatic relationship to their own sexuality. The silhouettes of Roy and Bruce represent a vital point with regards to Alison's discovery of her own sexuality. Their appearance in the bookshop emphasizes the extent to which Bechdel associates her own sexuality with her father's, a connection established by and through the presence and use of literary

allusions. In order for this to be communicated, the reader must be able to dissect Bechdel's intricate use of intertextuality, and understand its vital role for allowing her testimony to take place.

Alison's unquenchable appetite for literature does not only explain the dominant presence of literature in *Fun Home*; it also establishes why literature is used to describe her relationship to her father, her sexuality and the characters of Bruce and Helen. Whitehead points out that "Intertextuality can suggest the surfacing to consciousness of forgotten or repressed memories."¹⁴⁷ The frame-narrator's importance in the narrative is thus further established through her possibility of pointing out connections that have previously escaped or disappeared from her memory, as on page 85-86 when the frame-narrator discusses how Bruce's suicide coincides almost to the day with the age F. Scott Fitzgerald was when he died. She does, however, conclude that hopefully this is only by chance, since this "would only confirm that his death was not my fault. That, in fact, it had nothing to do with me at all. And I'm reluctant to let go of that last, tenuous bond."¹⁴⁸ Through the world of literature Bechdel can testify to feelings that are difficult to concretize; literature becomes a tool that Bechdel can use in order to employ feelings and characterizations that are not attainable to her without the artistic distance that literary allusions provide.

It is, however, also important to note what LaCapra explains in *History and its Limits*, how a personal testimony easily becomes influenced by media of various sorts: "... influenced or shaped by commentary and by exposure to the media or signifying practices such as films, novels, or histories, on the levels both of construing events and of templates for narratives or interpretations."¹⁴⁹ The example from the previous paragraph regarding the correlation between Bruce's death and Fitzgerald's death shows how two historical incidents easily could have been construed into a meaningful, connected fact. Bechdel does not do this, interestingly enough, because of the origin of the narrative: Bruce Bechdel. If she proved to herself and the reader that Bruce, in fact, committed suicide as a homage to Fitzgerald it would render Alison, in the eyes of the frame-narrator, blameless. A central part of Alison's testimony lies precisely in the connection between her coming-out and Bruce's suicide four months later. Bechdel's transmission of this testimony is, for her, necessarily linked to literature: linked because

¹⁴⁷ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 85.

¹⁴⁸ Bechdel *Fun Home*, 86.

¹⁴⁹ LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*, 62.

until the very end of both the narrative and Bruce's life, their only real connection was their love of literature.

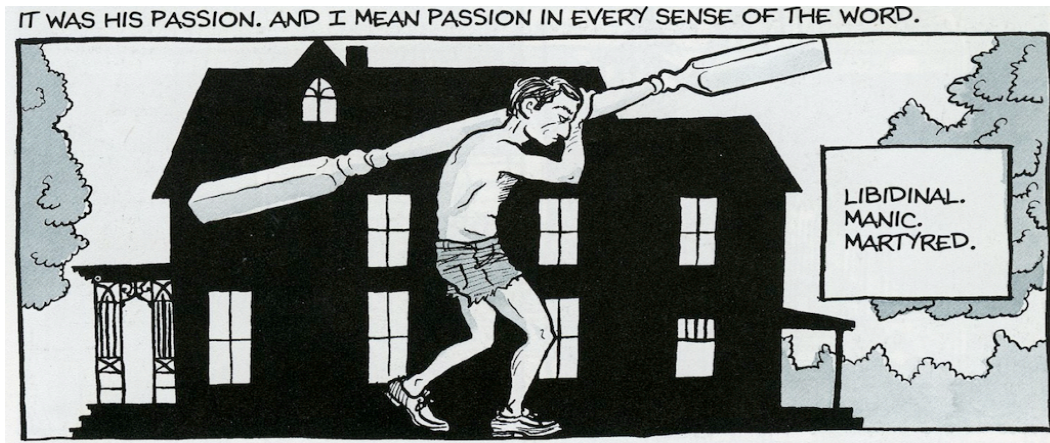
As the frame-narrator notes on page 67, "I employ these allusions to James and Fitzgerald not only as descriptive devices, but because my parents are most real to me in fictional terms."¹⁵⁰ This self-reflexive comment bears resemblance to the chapter in *Maus* called "Time Flies"; in both incidents the frame-narrator, or the character in the graphic memoir, addresses the premises and challenges of the narrative. In *Fun Home* this self-reflexive remark concretizes a notion Whitehead noted in *Trauma Fiction*: "A self-conscious use of intertextuality can introduce reflexive distance into the narrative and, to repeat the words of Newman, problematise the relation of fiction to the world."¹⁵¹ This is, however, not limited to "the relation of fiction to the world," but also in the relation between truth, testimony, fiction and the world. Bechdel's use of literature as a descriptive device in her testimony challenges her establishment of a truthful narrative. It also works as a descriptive device for the climate of the Bechdel family; an exterior appearance upheld at the cost of the individual family members. Bruce's identity is largely built around the restoration of the Bechdel house, "He was an alchemist of appearance, a savant of surface, a Daedalus of decor. . . . It was his passion. And I mean passion in every sense of the word. Libidinal. Manic. Martyred."¹⁵² The graphical characterization here mixes a libidinal, manic, martyred Bruce drawn as a Jesus figure walking with his cross (pillar) towards Golgotha with a literary allusion to Daedalus. Bruce Bechdel used his aesthetic gift to mask his personality, his sexuality and himself; he used the house and his family to obscure reality. As the frame-narrator notes regarding the different ornaments in the house, "They were embellishments in the worst sense. They were lies."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 67.

¹⁵¹ Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 92.

¹⁵² Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 6-7.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 4, 7.

The use of literary allusions furthermore become entwined with the extensive reproducing of family photos that Bechdel delves into in *Fun Home*; this process attests to a working-through, a way into the difficult moments presented in the different chapters of the testimony. The use of family photographs is an important aspect of *Maus* as well. However, Spiegelman's purpose for introducing his family photographs is not entirely the same as Bechdel's – Spiegelman uses family photographs to illustrate the simultaneous connection and disconnection he has to the unfathomable events during the Holocaust, his family and the suicide of his mother. The photographs in *Fun Home* allow Bechdel to anchor her memoir in a truth-based framework. Simultaneously, in similarity with Spiegelman's family photographs, the photographs open up for revisitations of traumatic, or important childhood moments. The narrative, thus, poignantly ends with a depiction of a family photograph (the photograph is presented on the title page of the same chapter, "The Antihero's Journey"). Fig. 3 and fig. 2 page 231 and 232 presents Bruce and Alison from different angles than the original photograph, marking the working-through of her traumatic relationship with her father. Furthermore the panels are framed by the frame-narrator's return to the Icarus (from the beginning of the memoir) metaphor: "He did hurtle into the sea, of course. But in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt."¹⁵⁴ The third-person pronoun *he* has an ambiguous referentiality, pointing both to Icarus (textually) and Bruce (graphically). This duality attests to the complex and distanced relationship between the textual and the visual aspects of the narrative, and furthermore exemplifies how an invested reader is required in order for the two to work

¹⁵⁴ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 232.

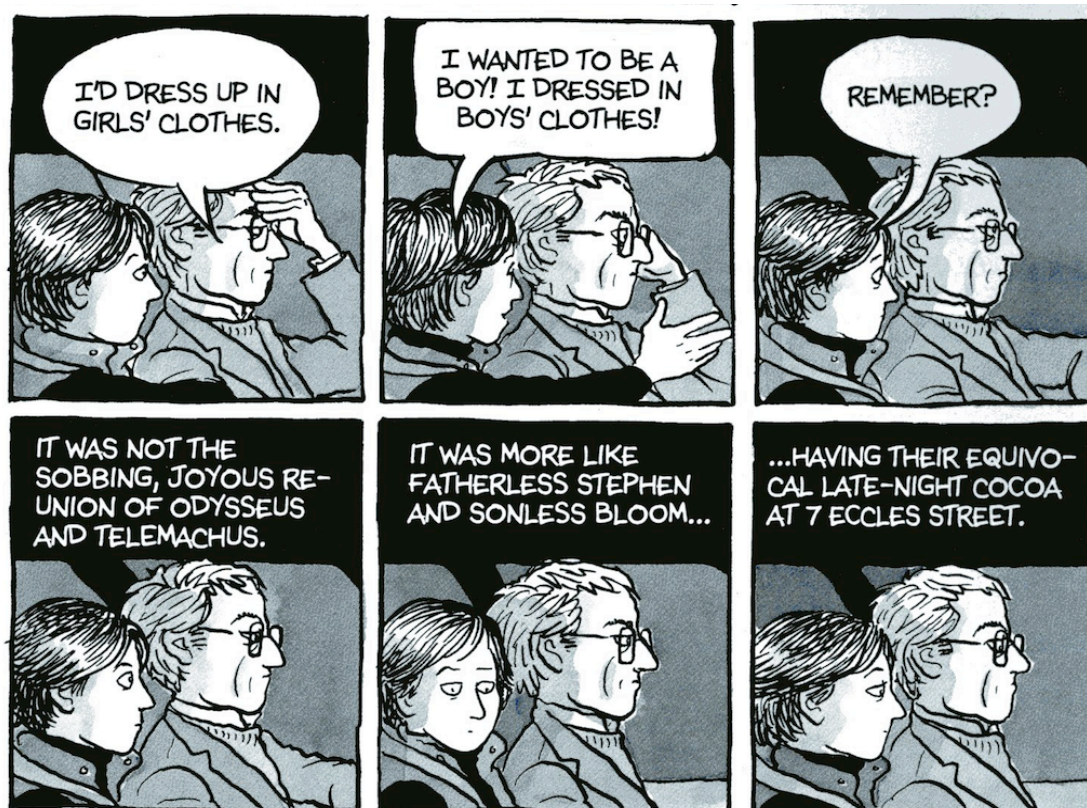
together as a meaningful whole. The different angles of the title photograph of Chapter Seven suggests a repetition, a possession and a working-through of a pivotal moment (and a relationship) too complicated to be reached without a necessary textual/visual testimonial journey where a curative ending can only be the result through an elaborate and thorough working-through; a result unreachable without an invested reader.

The ending of *Fun Home* does, however, question LaCapra's idea of writing as an inherently curative process. For LaCapra, writing about one's traumatic experiences signifies a movement from acting-out to working-through; by making the experience(s) accountable (only to the extent that the event(s) can be remember) one is challenging the unaccountability aspect of trauma that several trauma theorists have written about (Cathy Caruth is one such theorist). The last comment by the frame-narrator on the last page of *Fun Home* is, in terms of working-through, very ambiguous; it is in fact strangely dissonant with regards to the rest of the narrative. It especially questions a situation that occurred a few pages earlier; the conversation that Alison and Bruce have in the car on the way to the cinema. Alison attempts to bond with her father by asking whether he knew about her sexuality before she was aware of it herself. Her father, at first, opens up, "I guess there was some kind of... identification. My first experience was when I was fourteen. . . . He was real well-built, with black, wavy hair. It was...nice."¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, as the panels on the next page show, their "Ithaca moment"¹⁵⁶ fades out; Bruce remains silent to Alison's attempt for recognition and further identification. The frame-narrator's comment, that Bruce, "in the tricky reverse narration . . . was there to catch me when I leapt,"¹⁵⁷ seems to contradict the previous perspective Bechdel has given us concerning their relationship; the narrative sequence that takes place on page 220-221 suggests that no true identification, no resolution is ever reached while Bruce was alive.

¹⁵⁵ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 220.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 221.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 232.



Bechdel, *Fun Home*, fig. 3,4,5,6,7 and 8, 221.

While the last comment by the frame-narrator in *Fun Home* gives hope to the idea that a curative ending has been reached in the course of the narrative, the conversation presented in the sequence above shows that Bruce was, at best, only partially there during Alison's childhood and adolescent life. The devastating effect this conversation had on Alison is accentuated by the visual representation of the frame-narrator's voice. While Alison and Bruce's voices are presented in speech-bubbles with a white background, the frame-narrator's comments are shown in the dark ceiling of the car, visually illustrating the troubling, unsatisfactory resolution of the conversation. Bechdel's leap into the past in *Fun Home* gives her the possibility of redefining how her father was there for her. In spite of this, and in spite of the frame-narrator's comment that her father was there, the graphic memoir clearly communicates an absence; a father who even in Bechdel's rewriting of the past, could only partially be there to "catch me when I leapt."¹⁵⁸ This is, in fact, communicated in the visual realm of the last panel. For while the frame-narrator alludes textually to the idea that Bruce was there to catch Alison, the visual depiction in this last panel captures Alison in mid-air, moving towards her father, however, not firmly placed in his arms. The reader may expect

¹⁵⁸ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 232.

Alison to land in her father's arms; however, in the visual working-through of the family photograph this does not happen. This becomes another example of a dissociative narration, a place where the textual narrative moves in one direction, while the visual depiction presents something else.¹⁵⁹

Bechdel furthermore states in an interview with Emma Brockes, "I had this fantasy that this book was going to heal us and bring us all together. I was going to tell the truth and everything would be out in the open. . . . That didn't happen."¹⁶⁰ This comment clearly problematizes LaCapra's notion of the curative process. For while the process of writing *Fun Home* may have been helpful for Bechdel, it did not heal the wounds of her family (which, in turn, implicates a failure of healing herself), or "bring us all together." In this context, one could consequently claim that Bechdel's goal with *Fun Home* did and did not work; while the graphic testimony did not bring the Bechdel family together, it may, nonetheless, be the start of a healing process. Writing about one's trauma does not mean that one can move completely beyond what has been experienced, it does, however, suggest that one can address the experience(s) in a different light than previously.

This is also precisely how LaCapra may after all be onto something; testimonies of trauma are not only recollections, a way of dealing with what has been experienced, it is a recreation of the symptoms associated by the witness as a part of the trauma, and this is precisely what an invested reader must recognize. Similarly to how Spiegelman uses postmemory as a narrative device in *Maus*, and how Folman uses the collective memory of other soldiers to find his own memories in *Waltz with Bashir*, Bechdel uses S2S transitions and a distanced frame-narrator to convey what she associates with her trauma. It is here that the reader's role, as a listener is made crystal clear; for it is precisely, as discussed throughout this entire chapter, the reader that realizes the "tricky reverse narration that impels" Alison and Bruce's "entwined stories."¹⁶¹ LaCapra is right regarding writing as a curative process insofar as he means that addressing one's own understanding and conceptualization of trauma necessarily implies breaking free from the static, fragmented memories to a more cohesive recollection of the past. While the origin of a testimonial narrative bars a full and complete recollection (and

¹⁵⁹ Thanks to Steen Christiansen for pointing this out, and the rest of the seminar group hosted by Michael Prince and the NNCORE network on "Intertextuality and Inspiration" in Kristiansand 23-25 March 2012.

¹⁶⁰ Emma Brockes, "I don't know why I reveal these things," interview with Alison Bechdel, December 1, 2008, accessed February 7, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/dec/01/alison-bechdel-fun-home>.

¹⁶¹ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 232.

consequently a complete healing), writing marks the beginning of a working-through process. Consequently, it seems plausible to claim that while Bechdel may feel that letting *Fun Home* out to the public did not heal her and her family's wounds, it may perhaps be the beginning of a process that culminates more forcefully, both for herself and her family, in her upcoming graphic memoir: *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama*.

It seems clear that closure manifests itself in much more than panel transitions in a graphic memoir. *Fun Home* seems to be a particularly *closed* narrative; a narrative where the reader is required to perform much deductive reasoning in order for meaning to emerge. The extensive use of S2S transitions and the gap between the frame-narrator's comments and the visual aspects of the narrative, require the reader to apply an unusually large amount of closure in order for the graphic memoir to become meaningful. This may, in turn, be seen as arguments for how the reader becomes a listener to Bechdel's testimony. Graphical and textual references to literature underline this point - literary allusions used to point out pivotal, or traumatic moments would be futile if an attentive listener could not deduct the underlying meaning. In contrast to both *Maus* and *Waltz with Bashir*, *Fun Home* has no inherit listener (no character within the narrative who provides the frame-narrator with a designated listener of the testimony), consequently it falls on the reader to assume this position.

Chapter 3: The Search for Testimony

“What do I know? I’m a screenwriter,” utters Ari Folman’s character in the graphic narrative *Waltz with Bashir* when his friend Boaz Rein-Buskila tells him about a specific nightmare he has been having the past two years. Boaz retorts, “That’s a kind of psychotherapy, too, isn’t it?”¹⁶² Indeed, when Black Tree TV later interviewed Folman, he was asked if the process of creating *Waltz with Bashir* had been therapeutic:

I think that any kind of filmmaking is therapeutic. I think that it doesn’t matter if you take a kid’s story from somewhere or you take an autobiographical story like this story, always, it is always about closing circles with your life. . . . I mean filmmakers they use, this is the way, this is the form of using a healing of selves by just doing. And of course when you go through such a personal story, like this one, it is a therapeutic process for me.¹⁶³

Not only does Boaz’s story evoke flashbacks from the first Lebanon war (Lebanon war from now on) for Folman, it begins the therapeutic process that is realized through the creation of *Waltz with Bashir*. Moreover, Boaz’s story presents one of the unique aspects of both the graphic narrative and the movie *Waltz with Bashir*: the concept of a collaborative testimony. The story Folman presents in the course of *Waltz with Bashir* would have been impossible to realize without the help of different acquaintances/friends/professionals who he visits throughout the narrative. Testimonials are inherently collaborative in the sense that the witness is addressing someone else, which is in fact a pre-requisite for testimony to take place. I therefore use the term “collaborative testimony” to discuss a testimony more complicated than a mere two-way communication. A collaborative testimony is a testimony that has multiple voices, a narrative that utilizes several listeners (Folman, in fact, also works as a listener in *Waltz with Bashir*) in order to reach previously unattainable memories. It should also be mentioned that the making of *Waltz with Bashir*, in contrast to *Maus* and *Fun Home*, includes a wide range of people in the creative process, something that underscores the collaborative aspect of the narrative, although it may challenge its categorization as a testimonial narrative.

Moreover, the term “collaborative testimony” should be viewed in relation to the concept of collective memory. The term “collective memory” was created by Maurice

¹⁶² Ari Folman and David Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir* (USA: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 8.

¹⁶³ Blacktree TV, “Golden Globe® Winner, Ari Folman Waltz with Bashir,” January 2, 2009, YouTube, 09:44-10:00 and 10:11-10:27, accessed February 28, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8lnHy6_OUU

Halbwachs and describes memory as a social construction. Halbwachs argued that collective memory is a group of people's ability to evoke a mutual understanding of what constitutes the memories of an event.¹⁶⁴ Lewis A. Coser states in *On Collective Memory*, "It is, of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past."¹⁶⁵ It is precisely in the context of this last citation that collaborative testimony bears resemblance to collective memory; in *Waltz with Bashir* Folman's testimony emerges as a consequence of conversation with several people who share a collective memory of the Lebanon war. This means that the collaborative testimony is not only created through collective memory; collective memory is also produced through collaborative testimony; memories are created through a collaboration of witnessing. The circular movement of these two concepts in relation to *Waltz with Bashir* indicates that there is also trauma on a larger, cultural level that is being addressed. A vital point to make in this connection is the fact that Folman's testimony is an *Israeli* memory; the collective memory that Folman presents is not *the* collective memory from the Lebanon war, but rather the collective memory of a handful of Israeli soldiers.

In turn, I believe it is interesting to discuss how Folman and David Polonsky use the comics medium to present Folman's testimony from the Lebanon war.¹⁶⁶ I will discuss how the graphic narrative interweaves different people's memories as a part of Folman's journey to recollect what he experienced as an Israeli soldier during this war. More specifically, I will argue that the graphical aspects of *Waltz with Bashir* play a decisive part of the realization of the narrative as a collaborative testimony. Furthermore, it seems clear that the different voices presented in the graphic narrative evoke memories that have previously remained hidden to Folman's consciousness; I will discuss how the graphical presentation of the communication between Folman and these individuals highlights the transitional, evocative force that the collective memory of others has on Folman and his testimonial narrative.

I will, almost exclusively, use the graphic narrative to discuss Folman's testimonial journey to regain his memories. My reasons for primarily discussing the graphic narrative, and not the animated movie, have to do with the gap that exists

¹⁶⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ David Polonsky was the art director of *Waltz with Bashir*.

between any given animated movie and a comics adaptation of the same movie. The previous chapter's discussion on the use of closure in *Fun Home* points to the amount of work a reader/viewer of a graphic narrative must do in order for the narrative to make sense. In an animated movie the transitions between each frame is seamlessly interwoven; a movie will not challenge the reader's logical and imaginative senses in the same manner as a graphic narrative necessarily does.

The Collaborative Testimony

The narrative structure of *Waltz with Bashir* may give the impression that the film, and the graphic narrative, is an animated documentary. It seems clear that it could easily be perceived as just this; Folman makes different trips to people that have taken part in the Lebanon war and presents how their stories connect to his own. Together they tell a heartbreaking story of how young boys are led into war; how the Israeli government did very little to stop the massacre at Sabra and Shatila; how the Christian Phalangists did not hesitate to kill children, women, young and old men in what may only be ascribed as a genocide. *Waltz with Bashir* attempts to communicate the meaninglessness of war, and it is structured around Folman's conversations with traumatized soldiers who have experienced gruesome events during the Lebanon war. The narrative is, however, clearly structured around precisely Folman's journey to regain his lost memories, and this is also where the narrative moves somewhat away from a documentary of the Lebanon war to a personal journey of recollection. The personal nature of Folman's search for his memories suggests that *Waltz with Bashir* is not only a documentary, but also a testimony. The focus of *Waltz with Bashir* is essentially not to document exactly what happened during the Lebanon war, but rather how the different stories of the interviewed people entwine with Folman's own experiences, and how these stories emerge into a collaborative testimony of the Lebanon war. Out of this emerges not only Folman's testimony, but also the testimonies of some of the people he talks to.

Due to *Waltz with Bashir*'s use of multiple narrative voices and its representations of flashbacks, dreams, and hallucinations, the structure of Folman's testimony, especially its graphical visualization, is put under severe pressure when it comes to cohesiveness. While the animated film has the advantage of sound to help maintain a structure to the scene transitions, the graphic narrative must rely on other methods (methods that are also used in the animated film) to create a transitional flow

that is recognizable and understandable to the reader. This is an interesting aspect of *Waltz with Bashir*, as part of the narrative's structure deals with precisely the fragmented, enclosed memories that are evoked as the narrative progresses. Folman's journey to find his lost memories is not supposed to be represented through a smooth graphical story, but rather a narrative that is symptomatic to the way testimonial narratives work. As Laub and Felman note in *Testimony*, "testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition" ¹⁶⁷ Rightly then, Folman and Polonsky present different narrative voices that, while helping Folman reach a deeper insight into his repressed memories, also fractures and distorts the narrative structure and Folman's own perception of his lost memories.

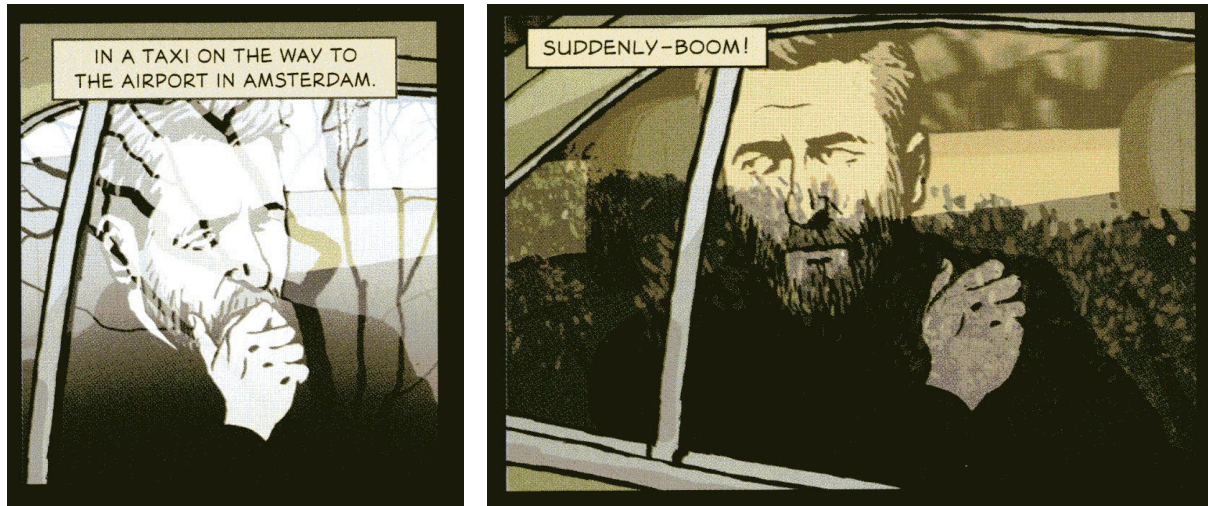
The collaborative testimony may consequently be seen as one of *Waltz with Bashir*'s chief narrative tools for emphasizing the fragmentary nature of any testimonial narrative. One example of this phenomenon takes place right after Folman has visited his friend Carmi Cna'an in Holland. After having listened to Cna'an's recollection from the war, Folman is abruptly brought back into a past war experience. The flashback occurs in a taxi on the way back to the airport in Amsterdam; Folman is shown in deep thought inside the taxi, with the wintry landscape of Holland drifting past the car in the background. The readers are presented with a reflection of the landscape in the window of the car, when "suddenly-boom!" ¹⁶⁸ the landscape shifts to Lebanon 1982, with Folman and his comrades inside a tank shooting randomly across the Middle Eastern scenery. It seems clear that Cna'an's relation of his memory has jolted Folman's own memories, and what follows is the first comprehensible representation of Folman's experiences from the Lebanon war. This boom also alludes to how suddenly and forcefully traumatic memories may reappear. Moreover, the frame-narrator's comment, "suddenly-boom!" ¹⁶⁹ creates an auditory association that the reader immediately associates as that of a sound from a war. The frame-narrator's comment thus receives a triple function: the boom becomes a textual tool that aids the visualization of the transition from the wintry landscape of Holland to the Middle Eastern scenery. It shows how suddenly and unexpectedly traumatic memories appear. Additionally, the

¹⁶⁷ Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, 5.

¹⁶⁸ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 28.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

graphic sound of the boom powerfully links both Folman's initial remembering from the war: that of shooting from a tank, and the reader's association of what constitutes war.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 2 and 3, 28.

Having had this epiphanic moment in the taxi the frame-narrator goes right on to search for someone “who was there that first night of the war, maybe even someone I’d brought to the place with the bright light. It took a while, but the search led to Ronnie Dayag, a biologist.”¹⁷⁰ The reader is then presented to Dayag’s story from the war, a heartbreaking, deeply traumatic story that ends with a man who does not deserve to, but still feels guilty for the fact that he survived while others did not. This guilt is not uncommon in survivors, something of which Pavel, Art Spiegelman’s shrink in *Maus*, addresses in relation to Vladek’s behavior towards Art.¹⁷¹ Dayag’s story goes over a little more than ten pages in *Waltz with Bashir*, and ends up with the presentation of the adult Dayag strolling thoughtfully on the same beach where he was almost killed over twenty years previously. This image works, narratively speaking, very interestingly as it creates a transition between Dayag’s story and Folman’s own memories from the same beach, memories that one could claim are evoked through Dayag’s narrative, thus exemplifying another act of the collaborative testimony. In three completely equal sized images the reader is shown how Dayag’s story glides seamlessly (as seamlessly as a graphic narrative and its gutters can be) into Folman’s own testimony; Dayag expresses

¹⁷⁰ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 34.

¹⁷¹ See *The Complete Maus*, 204.

at the end of page 44, “It’s as if I didn’t do enough. I wasn’t the kind of hero who pulls out his weapons and saves everyone. That’s not who I am.”¹⁷² The silent panel on the next page then shows the previously mentioned Dayag walking on the beach, with the frame-narrator’s comment in the next panel pointing out, “A month after Ronnie Dayag had swum back to his regiment... the army had taken control of the coastline from which he had escaped, the same area where I’d evacuated the bodies that first night of the war.”¹⁷³ The representation of Dayag walking on the beach where he escaped as a young man illustrates a freedom of representation that is also seen in *Maus* and *Fun Home*, and while not correlating directly, may be seen as an example of a concept discussed by Ohad Landesman and Roy Bendor.

Landesman and Bendor present in their essay: “Animated Recollection and Spectatorial Experience in *Waltz with Bashir*,” an extension of Martin Heidegger’s discussion of the difference between factual and factical material (the first term points to information that can be validated through research to have occurred, while the latter cannot). Landesman and Bendor claim that *Waltz with Bashir* contains both factual memories and factical memories, and that precisely this mixing relates to the nature of *Waltz with Bashir* as a narrative. “This movement between factual and factical memory is the quintessential marker of a process of remembering. In this sense, *Waltz with Bashir* is as much about memory itself as it is about the retrieval of specific memories.”¹⁷⁴ The movement between factual and factical memories in *Waltz with Bashir* is an important aspect of how the collaborative testimony is realized; other people’s stories trigger a creation of both factual and factical memories for Folman, consequently, his entire testimony ends up being directly influenced by the memories from other people.

Waltz with Bashir’s use of testimonies from different veterans from the Lebanon war explicitly shows how Folman regains a conscious awareness of his formerly lost, or neglected memories through a collaborative process. When Folman, for a second time, mentions to his friend Cna’an (he is the only person Folman can recognize from a hallucination that will be discussed more thoroughly later) that “you’re there with

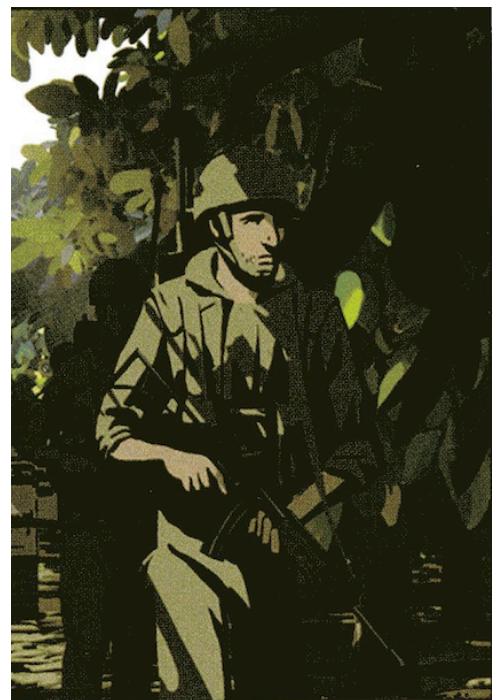
¹⁷² Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 44.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷⁴ Ohad Landesman and Roy Bendor, “Animated Recollection and Spectatorial Experience in *Waltz with Bashir*,” *Animation* 6, 3 (2011): 356, doi: 10.1177/1746847711417775.

me,”¹⁷⁵ Cna’an replies, “You’re crazy, you know? You’re a real psycho. What beach? What are you talking about? How could anyone have been on the beach that night? What are you talking about? What beach?”¹⁷⁶ When Folman then once again meets up with his best friend, Ori Sivan, to discuss what the hallucination may mean, Sivan gives an explanation that fits well with Landesman and Bendor’s discussion of factual and factical memories. Folman says, “I can’t find a single genuine memory of anyone connected to me then. The only thing I have is the hallucination,” to which Sivan replies, “But your hallucination is real, it’s yours.”¹⁷⁷ While Folman’s factual memories can be traced down through a collaborative testimony, his factical memories are essentially only his own. They are, however, clearly an important part of his testimony. The hallucinations attest to a metaphorical recollection, as Sivan suggests, “In dreams the sea symbolizes fear, feelings. The massacre frightens you. You brushed up against it.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly to the dream Boaz speaks of which opens the narrative of *Waltz with Bashir*, the hallucinations Folman have are intimately connected to his traumatic experiences from the Lebanon war.

While Folman’s hallucination, Boaz’s dream and the dream Can’an remembers all work as prime examples of factual memories, Folman’s interview with Shmuel Frenkel, Folman’s cabinmate for some time, verifies Folman’s presence during the Israeli troops “hunt for terrorists,”¹⁷⁹ and, in turn, works as an example of a factual memory. Folman asks Frenkel whether he was there or not (after he has already been visually represented as present during the shooting of a young Palestinian boy with an RPG, see panel to the right), to which Frenkel replies, “What do you mean, were you there? Wherever I



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 1, 54.

¹⁷⁵ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 89.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 90.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

went, you went with me. Of course you were there.”¹⁸⁰ Interestingly, Folman does not have any recollection of the orchard and the RPG boy even after Frenkel relates the events to him. Professor Zahava Solomon¹⁸¹ calls this a “dissociative event”, and explains it as, “when a person is in a certain situation but feels like he’s outside of it.”¹⁸² Consequently, one of Folman’s allegedly factual memories is a dissociative event, while one of his only actual memories, the hallucination, works as a factual memory. The factuality of the orchard experience is rooted in collective memory, and consequently works as an example of the collaborative testimony; Folman cannot remember having been in the orchard, however, the graphic narrative still places him in the specific scene. It places him there because even though he cannot remember it, the memory of his presence is still preserved in other people who were also there.

It seems that this part of Folman’s testimony is simultaneously a personal and a collaborative testimony. Frenkel’s dominant voice in the telling of the events relates to the testimony of someone other than Folman himself, however, as the story, in fact, places him at the scene, Folman’s lack of memory from the incident may serve to testify to the severity and effect it actually had on his younger self. Consequently, the collaborative testimony is realized through a retelling and a visual representation of the traumatic event that is, simultaneously, not attainable as a factual memory for Folman. The reader, thus, becomes a witness to the breaking down of witnessing, a visualization that is quite unique; the collaborative testimony allows one teller to relate to a traumatic incident where the main narrator was present, while showing how this person has no recollection of the events. Consequently, Folman’s memories of these events are, to him, completely factual, they are a creation of inherited memories from Frenkel; Frenkel’s memories of the same events are, however, factual, as he actually remembers being there (and the assumed fact that Folman was indeed with him). Witnessing thus appears as completely imaginary for Folman, he must rely on Frenkel’s testimony in order to be able to say, “I was there,” and this explicitly exemplifies the collaborative testimony that takes place in *Waltz with Bashir*.

The title of Folman’s testimony, *Waltz with Bashir*, is taken from a specific scene that takes place towards the end of the narrative. This scene is particularly interesting with regards to narrative voices and sequence; this is the only sequence in

¹⁸⁰ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 57.

¹⁸¹ The name given in the graphic narrative of *Waltz with Bashir* is wrong, her first name is written Zahava, not Zehava.

¹⁸² Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 58.

the graphic memoir where three different people (including Folman himself) contribute in order to narrate what took place in one specific scene. Throughout *Waltz with Bashir*, Folman, or one individual who Folman talks with, tells the retrospective stories; these stories are then interrupted, or simply moved past as another part of Folman's quest for his memories is presented. The "Waltz with Bashir" sequence is therefore a unique scene in the narrative; the inclusion of multiple frame-narrators within one specific scene points to an interwoven narrative sequence that implicates multiple perspectives of the same situation.

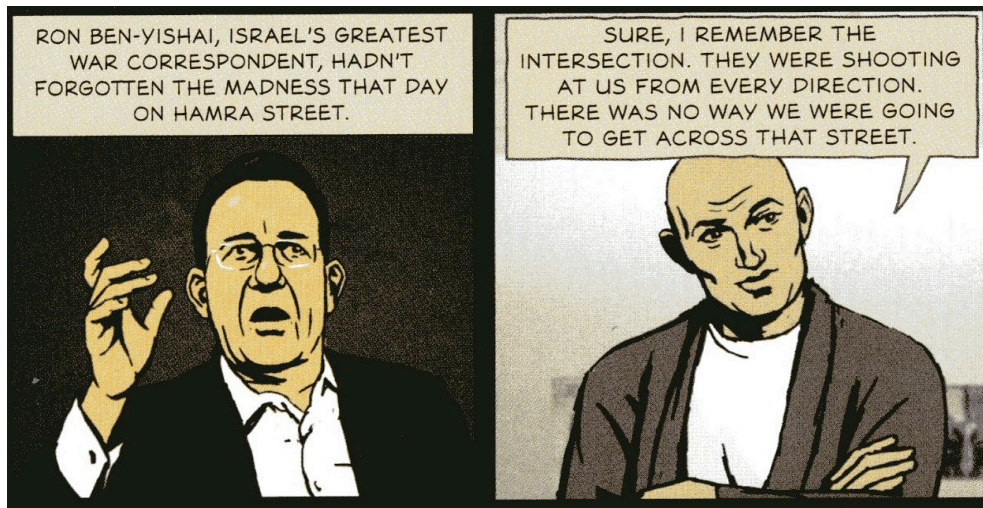
The "Waltz with Bashir" scene of the graphic narrative begins with Folman's narrative voice telling the reader how he and his company started moving from the international airport in Beirut into the city. As they progress into the city, they walk past large towering multi-story hotels; in one particular intersection they are ambushed by snipers, and have to seek cover in a ditch on the side of the road. At this point Folman narrates, "We were scared out of our minds. And in the middle of this total hell, that journalist from TV showed up, Ron Ben-Yishai. He was striding through the bullets, tall, upright, superman, walking as if there was nothing going on."¹⁸³ Here it is vital to be aware of how the animated film depicts this situation, for while the graphic narrative introduces Ben-Yishai at this point, it does not specify who is talking; that it is in fact Ben-Yishai who works as the frame-narrator. Ben-Yishai relates how an RPG makes its particular sound right as it passes you, and how this sound (a whizzing noise) makes you unable to hear the actual crash of the missile; furthermore Ben-Yishai talks of how civilians were standing on their balconies not far back from the intersection "watching as if they were at a movie."¹⁸⁴ The narrative then shifts once again; the frame-narrator changes to Frenkel, who was one of the other soldiers stuck in the ditch with Folman. He fills in with his memories from the event, "Sure, I remember the intersection. They were shooting at us from every direction. There was no way we were going to get across that street. . . . I knew I had to do something dramatic. We weren't going to get out of there otherwise."¹⁸⁵ These two different narrative voices on page 82 and 83 are not only given exactly one page each to relate their personal experience from this particular scene; the two pages work as a mirroring of each other. While the number of panels is not the same, the size of all the panels combined adds up perfectly. Furthermore, the

¹⁸³ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 81.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 83.

two present-day panels depicting Ben-Yishai and Frenkel are presented in line with each other, Ben-Yishai in the top right corner of page 82, and Frenkel in the top left corner of page 83. This visual equality gives their narrative voices an identical amount of narrative dominance, and works as an example of how Folman uses both testimonies equally in order to strengthen the factuality of his own memory from their shared experience.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 2, 82 (left panel) and fig. 1, 83 (right panel).

On page 84 Folman once again assumes the role as the frame-narrator, relating how he watched Frenkel run out into the middle of the intersection, swirling gracefully as if he were dancing, shooting in all directions, while performing “a waltz among their bullets.”¹⁸⁶ Frenkel’s actions during this event are thus collaboratively narrated, first by Frenkel himself, who explains how he had to “do something dramatic,”¹⁸⁷ and then from Folman’s own perspective, which the graphic narrative presents with a close-up of him from the ditch, while the frame-narrator says, “From where I was crouching, I watched Frenkel take the intersection.”¹⁸⁸ This witnessing is especially interesting since Folman performs a double witnessing of Frenkel; he is a listener to Frenkel’s testimony in the present, while simultaneously also being a witness to Frenkel’s actions as he performed what he testifies to. Cathy Caruth has stated with regards to PTSD, and trauma, that it is “intimately bound up with a question of truth. The problem arises . . . in regard to those who listen to the traumatized, not knowing how to establish the reality

¹⁸⁶ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 85.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

of their hallucinations and dreams”¹⁸⁹ However, in this specific scenario the listener of Frenkel’s testimony was also a witness to the event. Consequently, the truthfulness of the account is collaborated by the two, both relating a similar story of what took place in this intersection. It seems likely that the collaborative testimony, while not being *the* truth, is, at least, truthful.

Tamar Ashuri has, on the other hand, in her essay “I Witness: Re-representing Trauma in and by Cinema,” suggested that this scene is:

an illusionary act, the director who bears witness to his commander’s testimony positions the audiences as witnesses to the soldier’s trauma. The title draws Folman and the audiences into a fictional world of hallucination. In focusing on this experience of a soldier who cannot comprehend, master or narrate the event that haunts him, the director turns the audience into witnesses of this void.¹⁹⁰

Although it may seem unlikely that the depiction of Frenkel’s “Waltz with Bashir,” is represented in a completely accurate manner, it is strange to see that Ashuri concludes, without hesitation, that the scene is “an illusionary act”. Folman does not solely “bear witness to his commander’s testimony,” as Ashuri claims; he also elaborates on his commander’s testimony. The collaborative testimony that takes place in this scene employs multiple witnesses, including Folman himself, in order to communicate to the reader/viewer what happened in this situation. In fact, it is Folman who narrates the scene depicting Frenkel and not Frenkel himself, as Ashuri suggests. Folman and Frenkel’s collaborative narrative, which works as a collaborative testimony, should be seen as a verification of the occurrence, not a “fictional world of hallucination.” Furthermore, as will be argued later in the chapter, the use of colors in this scene also has a marked significance in relation to the accuracy of how the memory is recollected. It is not by chance that dreams and hallucinations are marked by an unrealistic visual presentation in terms of use of colors, while other scenes are depicted in more colorfully realistic terms.

Similarly to how Frenkel is shown and depicted dancing on the intersection, so does the narrative seamlessly interweave Folman, Ben-Yishai and Frenkel’s voices. The collaborative testimony, in terms of recreating factual memories, works at its best here; together the three war veterans recreate and re-visualize the situation and together come

¹⁸⁹ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Tamar Ashuri, “I Witness: Re-representing Trauma in and by Cinema,” *The Communication Review* 13, 3 (2010): 11.

to a recollection that is as meaningful and helpful as this memory can be for Folman's further journey for the ultimate, most inaccessible memory: the massacres in Sabra and Shatila. The reader's perception of this collaboration and its truthfulness, is clearly connected to how one sees the act of collaborative testimony, and, in turn, the collaboration of re-remembering. I will only shortly note here what Suparna Rajaram and Luciane P. Pereira-Pasarin concludes in their abstract of an article they wrote called "Collaborative Memory: Cognitive Research and Theory": "Collaboration can also lead to forgetting and increase memory errors. Conversely, collaboration can also improve memory under proper conditions."¹⁹¹ The truthfulness of the "Waltz with Bashir" scene is therefore dependent upon the reader's perception of the collaborative testimony here, and whether the conditions of the process are deemed proper. One clue that supports the truthfulness of this scene, and which will be discussed in the following sub-chapter, is the use of colors.

The "Waltz with Bashir" scene jumps directly to a conversation Folman has with Can'an, this time during summer in Holland. While their conversation does not amount to much this time, (Can'an's anger and frustration in Folman's questions is presented in a quotation earlier where Can'an calls Folman a psycho) the scene leads Folman to a vital conversation with Sivan. Folman says to Sivan, "I can't find a single genuine memory of anyone connected to me then."¹⁹² Sivan claims that the only way of finding out what happened is to "learn what really happened in Sabra and Shatila. Talk to people, find out how it happened, who was where. Get the details. They might lead you to remember where you were and how you're connected to it."¹⁹³ Not only does this conversation illuminate the listener-witness relationship that the two perform in the course of the narrative, it also explicitly points out that one of the listeners suggests that the witness should talk to other people, hear their stories, and through this possibly gain a recollection of the events. This is exactly what Folman does: the collaborative testimony reaches its final resolution as Folman talks with two first-hand witnesses.

Clearly, the presentation of memories in *Waltz with Bashir* is a complicated matter. This is not only so because Folman himself is uncertain of exactly which memories are factual and which are factical, it is also so due to the extensive presentation of other people's memories. The relation of different people's memories

¹⁹¹ Suparna Rajaram and Luciane P. Pereira-Pasarin, "Collaborative Memory: Cognitive Research and Theory," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, 6 (2010): abstract.

¹⁹² Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 90.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 91.

explicitly addresses the collaborative testimony in Folman's narrative, and moreover it shows how the line between factual and factical memories can be difficult to distinguish. Folman invests much time (and space) in the narrative to present the voices of other Israeli soldiers from the war; their voices help to validate and collaborate on what he does remember, and to fill in the blanks of what he cannot recall. *Waltz with Bashir* reveals the way in which memories, and especially traumatic ones, float between the factual and the factical – what may be a factual memory for one individual is only a floating, distant factical memory for someone else. Sivan's comment to Folman on what memory is, in the beginning of the narrative, "Memory is dynamic, it's alive,"¹⁹⁴ becomes a meta-comment on the entire graphic narrative – the dynamic presentation of factual and factical memories in *Waltz with Bashir* allows Folman (and some of the other witnesses) to testify how different experiences are recollected – not simply as factual recollections, but as a sensory and more accurate testimony to how memories are, in fact, remembered. Truthfulness thus becomes a complicated matter; a visual indication of whether certain scenes are, in fact, truthful or not, will be addressed in the following sub-chapter.

Graphical Communication – Visual Testimony

Waltz with Bashir's dispersed framework and fragmentary narrative sequence, created partly through the representation of the different memories or reflections on memories given by the various people in the narrative, challenges the readers'/viewers' ability to distinguish between who is talking, or who is remembering, and also what part of a representation is a hallucination, a dream, a flashback, or a recollection. Although the different frame-narrators of the graphic narrative often hint at whether we are witnessing a dream, a hallucination, or something closer to a real representation of what took place in a given scene, the intricate use of coloring in *Waltz with Bashir* suggests that more is communicated to an invested reader than simply what the frame-narrators tell us. Throughout the entire graphic narrative the reader is presented to scenes that are visually represented in various colors and various tones of lighting: this would seem to suggest that some form of communication can be found in the purely visual representation of *Waltz with Bashir*. Already on the very first page of the graphic narrative the reader/viewer is introduced to one central color: yellow. The importance of

¹⁹⁴ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 17.

this specific color will be returned to later. For now, it is interesting to simply note the dominant presence of this one specific color from page 1 to 12 and 92 to 115. In stark contrast to the extensive use of colors in *Waltz with Bashir* stand both *Maus* and *Fun Home*. In spite of this, the dominant color(s) in Spiegelman and Bechdel's narratives, black and white and greenish washed out color respectively, share an important relation to the use of the color yellow in *Waltz with Bashir*, the conveyance of thematic significance.

Another interesting visualization that will be discussed is the presentation of Folman's conversation with professor Solomon. Her narrative of a young soldier who avoided a confrontation with the reality of the Lebanon war through an imaginary camera, and the subsequent moment when the camera broke down will be discussed and presented as an important part of Folman's own testimony. Folman's conversation with Solomon, who is regarded as a world expert on combat trauma, is probably the closest he comes to a therapy session. It therefore seems interesting to note that the narrative focuses as much on her story (if not more) of the young soldier, than on Folman's story told to her. This brings to mind a comment that was made by the journalist Deborah Solomon during an interview with Folman, "The problem with therapy is that you're listening to no one but yourself. How can you learn anything?" to which, Folman replies, "That's a very good sentence. Can I use it from now on, as if I invented it?"¹⁹⁵ Folman seems to agree that you cannot learn anything by being the only speaker, and while there is certainly a two-way communication in any witness-listener relation, *Waltz with Bashir* takes this to the extreme; Folman's realization is only reached when a double-digit number of people have been communicated with. This separates Folman's testimony in *Waltz with Bashir* from Spiegelman's and, especially, Bechdel's respective testimonies in their graphic narratives, in relation to what constitutes a helpful therapeutical session. There is, however, a simple answer to this difference; therapy is about finding out what works for the individual, and in the case of Folman, the solution is clearly linked to the collaborative testimony.

Here it seems necessary to quickly note that the collaborativeness of Folman's testimony is rooted deeply in the structural core of the graphic narrative, seeing it as created by a team of artists, in contrast to most graphic memoirs. The visual aspects of *Waltz with Bashir* are not created by Folman himself, and consequently, the purely

¹⁹⁵ Deborah Solomon, "Questions for Ari Folman: The Peacemaker," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2009, accessed February 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11wwln-Q4-t.html>.

visual communication that occurs on the pages of the graphic narrative must be seen as a coming together between Folman's testimonial process and the artists' visualization of his memories. A discussion of some of the graphical aspects of *Waltz with Bashir* is, therefore, a presentation of another example of the collaborative nature of the entire narrative. In this sense *Maus* also works as a collaborative testimony; Spiegelman's visualization of Vladek's testimony happens in collaboration between the witness' telling of his experiences and the listener's understanding and visualization of this story. The difference between *Waltz with Bashir* and *Maus* lies in the fact that Spiegelman only uses one witness, and additionally that the collaboration, the process of listening to another testimony, does not help Spiegelman regain lost memories, like Folman, but rather helps him understand how the Holocaust, through postmemory, also affected him.

Folman's initial remembrance from the Lebanon war happens while he is driving home from a bar, having just listened to Boaz's narration of a dream that has continuously haunted his sleep for the past two years. While looking out toward the sea, a sharp light appears in the corner of Folman's eye. The lights that Folman sees create a visual transition between the present time, and what the frame-narrator initially describes as a flashback (he later learns that this flashback is partly a hallucination). The yellow light, which occurs visually (most likely only imaginatively, see fig. 4 below) in the present, creates the necessary link to some of the repressed memories from the past. The yellow spark literally sparks Folman's memory, and a hallucination begins to haunt him: himself as a young soldier waking up in the water with two of his comrades from the war. The hallucination that Folman experiences works as a testimony to the traumatic nature of his experience from the Lebanon war, his feeling of guilt has manifested in such a way that his memories from the war are forgotten; when they resurface (literally through his awakening in water) the elusiveness of memory is shown explicitly through the interwoven sequence where the line between factual and factical memories becomes a slippery matter.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 3 and 4, 10.

In this context, Landesman and Bendor make an interesting remark with regards to how *Waltz with Bashir* is divided between, mainly, two different forms of narrative representation:

Folman's conversations with friends, along with different segments of the talking heads interviews, obey a conventional documentary format and use realistic colour schemes. They are sketched in a more realistic and straightforward way, placing the camera in standard (mostly frontal) positions, and remain relatively faithful to the original setting. On the other hand, scenes whose content is more factual than factual are characterized by an overly aestheticized, spectacle-like quality, sketched with extremely contrasted colours, spatial disproportions, slow movement and three-dimensional inserts.¹⁹⁶

Their observations regarding Folman's interviews with friends, veterans from the war, a reporter and a professor seems to be an accurate description of how the graphical parts of *Waltz with Bashir* attempt to create a visual segregation between different types of memories. The conversations between Folman and other war-veterans follow a presentational style often used in documentaries, however, additionally, a similar way of interviewing can also be seen in many examples of video testimonies by Holocaust survivors. As the stories of war-veterans and survivors are, inherently, fragmented and chaotic, the presentation of the recollection of these events is consequently visualized as a stark contrast to the safety of the present-day conversation. Furthermore, in order to establish both the origin and the nature of the represented memories, color and lighting

¹⁹⁶ Landesman and Bendor, "Animated Recollection and Spectatorial Experience," 4.

are used extremely consciously to communicate to the reader what parts of the narrative are anchored in factual memories, and which memories that are rooted in more factual recollections.

Consequently, the use of colors in *Waltz with Bashir* is an important clue in relation to the visual depiction of the different memories that are being represented. A breakdown of some of the different uses of color in the graphic narrative can, in turn, shed some light on how Folman and his team of artists wanted color to work as a silent testimony to the origin of the different memories. This can, at times, be the only communication that the reader receives regarding the origin of the represented event; the difference between a dream, hallucination, flashback, or a clear memory is sometimes condensed into a difference in the use of the color spectra, and it therefore seems vital that the reader/viewer is able to understand this.

Page 1 to 4 and 22 to 23 represent the only parts of the narrative that are clarified as dreams; these pages have a sparse use of colors, however, both are dominated by one or a few colors that clearly stand out. In the first dream yellow is emphasized; the eyes and mouths of the dogs, the background, the sky, and the lighting of the scene are all dominated by a sharp yellow color that may remind the reader/viewer of the fact that yellow has been associated with madness and mental illness in literature for quite some time. The symbolic connotation of the color yellow in *Waltz with Bashir* is not limited to this characterization; the color also represents guilt and, more narratively speaking, the way in which memory can be evoked. As will be shown, the visual presentation of colors in relation to the dreams of *Waltz with Bashir* has repercussions reaching beyond the imaginary level; the use of colors, especially the color yellow, becomes an important cue as to what Folman discovers at the end of his testimony.

Perhaps not as far back into the subconscious as dreams, we find hallucinations. Hallucinations are, however, in contrast to dreams, often viewed as unhealthy, and are usually seen as a symptom of some form of mental disorder, health problems, and/or psychological breakdown.¹⁹⁷ While both dreams and hallucinations are examples of psychological issues in *Waltz with Bashir*, hallucinations only occur during a time when the individual is awake. This may challenge the one who experiences the hallucination as it becomes difficult to differentiate it from reality, or, in the case of *Waltz with*

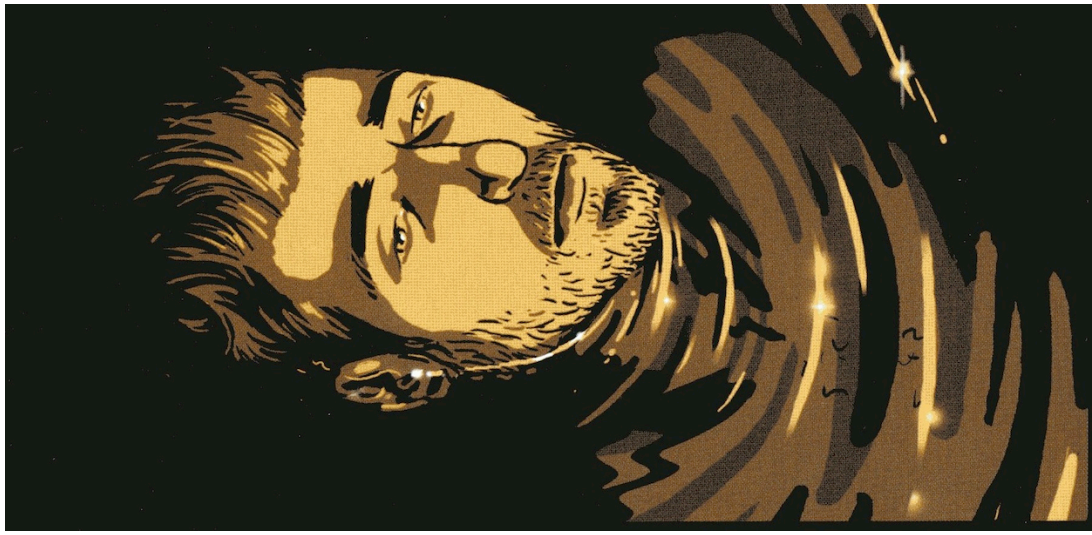
¹⁹⁷ *The New York Times*, "Health Guide," accessed February 22, 2012.
<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/symptoms/hallucinations/overview.html>.

Bashir, from a flashback, or a real memory. Similarly, it is equally difficult for the reader to separate between what are representations of memories and what are representations of dreams/hallucinations; the use of colors, in addition to the frame-narrator's voice, are consequently vital communicative tools in order for the testimony to contain the different levels of remembrance that occurs.

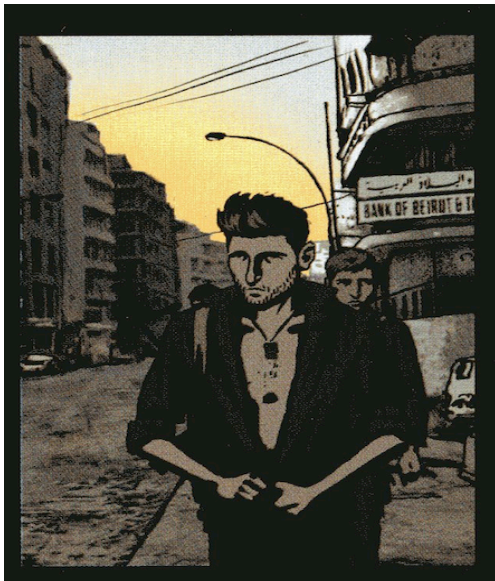
The color-use in Folman's hallucination is especially interesting because the colors slowly change from a stark yellow light that flares omit, to a more gray-toned, neutral and more realistic depiction of the scene. This visual depiction illustrates the transition between Folman's hallucination and his flashbacks; while the hallucination from the beach is fictional, the gray tone used in the depiction of streams of women and children moving towards him comes close to a real experience. It seems that the sparse use of colors may symbolize factual memories, while the more colorful, realistic depictions suggests factual memories.¹⁹⁸ The two panels from page eleven and twelve on the following page illustrate the hallucination and the transition between the hallucination and a flashback. It seems especially interesting to note how the graphic narrative (this is not shown as explicitly in the animated film) portrays the sky in the second panel on page 12; a fading yellow light can be detected in the horizon, clearly pointing out a transitional phase. Comparatively, the panel from page 28 shows a part of Folman's testimony that he characterizes as, "no hallucination, no dream, nothing subconscious."¹⁹⁹ This statement by the frame-narrator can thus, due to the use of colors in this scene, seem to suggest that when a realistic visual representation is given, Folman perceives the memory presented as truthful.

¹⁹⁸ Landesman and Bendor, "Animated Recollection and Spectatorial Experience," 6.

¹⁹⁹ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 28.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 2, 11.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 2, 12.



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 5, 28.

Interestingly, this fully colored depiction sets this narrative sequence in relation to three other sequences in *Waltz with Bashir* where Folman's narration from the past is not depicted with a sparse use of colors: the "Waltz with Bashir" scene, his home-leave memories, and the part where he tells Boaz of a villa on the outskirts of Beirut (the airport scene is also rendered in realistic colors, however, this scene is connected to the "Waltz with Bashir" scene). What these scenes have in common seem to be their likelihood of being truthful. His flashbacks from the massacre in Sabra and Shatila are depicted sparsely colored, while the previously mentioned scenes and every interview

made in *Waltz with Bashir* is presented with fairly realistic colors. The rendering of color seems to be closely tied to the factuality of the represented events.

The visual presentation, the use of colors, in relation to the depiction of other people's memories in *Waltz with Bashir* is especially interesting with regards to the collaborative aspects of the graphic testimony. The different memories are almost exclusively, with the exception of Boaz and Can'an's dreams, depicted in realistic colors. The reasons for this may be various, however, it seems likely that Folman hardly feels that it is up to him to judge whether another person's remembrance is accurate or not. Additionally, several of the presented memories coincide with Folman's own presence at the different events, and as has been discussed with regards to the "Waltz with Bashir" scene, the collaborative aspect of the narrative, in fact, reinforces the truthfulness of the retrospective representation. The consistency that follows in Folman's presentation of other people's testimonies make the two last interviews of the graphic narrative especially interesting.

Folman's conversations with Dror Jarazi and Ron Ben-Yishai are visualized in a unique way as opposed to all of the other interviews that take place in the course of *Waltz with Bashir*. These two testimonies are both directly linked to the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, and this is clearly a vital clue for the specific rendering that takes place from page 92 to 113. While the depictions remain realistic in these two testimonies as well, they are visualized with a faded, yellowish light that permeate the entire panels. This stands in sharp contrast to the few panels that portray Jarazi and Ben-Yishai in the present. These are fully colored, similarly to the previously mentioned people that have contributed with their testimonies in the graphic narrative. The yellow color must clearly be seen in relation to the yellow color that pervades Folman's hallucination, however, the origin of the yellow color, and the reason for the use of this specific color, is more intricate.

Folman's conversation with Jarazi reveals that crucial information regarding the events taking place inside the refugee camps in Sabra and Shatila was discovered by the Israeli army while the massacre took place, however, due to the fact that few people had a complete overview of the situation, nothing was done. While Jarazi attempted to warn his superiors of what was happening, their unwillingness to take action ultimately lead to Jarazi's life in guilt. The *Waltz with Bashir* website paraphrases Jarazi as saying that he "considers his participation in "Waltz with Bashir" a necessity, a cry out, another last

attempt to tell his story knowing full well that nothing can now change history.”²⁰⁰ The Israeli military dismissed Jarazi from duty and left him as a scapegoat of what took place in the refugee camps. His testimony in *Waltz with Bashir* consequently works curatively for Jarazi both in terms of telling his story, but also of redeeming himself. Moreover, his story helps Folman remember his own role during the massacre and creates a transition to the second interview in the narrative with Ben-Yishai.

Ben-Yishai tells Folman how he was made aware of the gruesome events that were taking place in the refugee camps, and that he attempted to contact Ariel Sharon to let him know of the severity of the situation. Sharon did not care. At this point in Ben-Yishai’s testimony, his story is interrupted by a conversation Folman has with Sivan. The graphic narrative goes back to the present and shows Folman and Sivan as they talk about Folman’s role in the massacre in Sabra and Shatila. Folman establishes that their role was to shoot up flares that would illuminate the sky, and consequently, “must have helped them do what they were doing down there,”²⁰¹ to which Sivan replies, “Were they flares that you fired?”²⁰² Folman cannot comprehend why it would matter whether he was the one that fired them, but Sivan explains, “In your perception at the time, when you were nineteen, there was no difference. The murderers and the circles around them were one and the same. Maybe that’s why you couldn’t remember the massacre, you felt guilty.”²⁰³ The narrative then returns to Ben-Yishai’s story, which culminates in a flashback that is similar to the grayish flashback presented at the beginning of *Waltz with Bashir*. Only this time, the yellowish light that has followed Jarazi and Ben-Yishai’s testimonies continues into Folman’s own flashback. Suddenly, the yellow light makes perfect sense; what the silent testimony of *Waltz with Bashir* attempts to communicate is the guilt that Sivan mentioned. Folman’s guilt (and, in turn, Jarazi and Ben-Yishai’s) from the massacre in Sabra and Shatila is illustrated through the yellow color that lights up all of the panels from this event. This becomes an example of an explicit visualization of the collaborative testimony; Folman uses Jarazi and Ben-Yishai’s testimonies to communicate to the reader/viewer both his own guilt and a collective guilt.

²⁰⁰ “Waltz with Bashir: An Ari Folman Film,” Accessed February 28, 2012.
<http://waltzwithbashir.com/film.html>.

²⁰¹ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 106.

²⁰² Ibid., 107.

²⁰³ Ibid.

The yellow light in the last 23 out of 25 pages of *Waltz with Bashir* can consequently be seen as a resurfacing of the hallucination that haunts Folman throughout the narrative; the vital part of the hallucination is thus the yellow light that



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, fig. 2 and 3, 115.

has manifested in Folman's subconscious: "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experienced it.

To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event."²⁰⁴

The yellow light that flares omit is Folman's reoccurring image, however, his realization of this would be unattainable without the help of

individuals such as Boaz, Sivan, Cna'an, Ben-Yishai and others. Folman uses the collaborative memory of two different

people present at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps at the time of the massacre, in order to visualize a collective guilt that is manifested in both him and the two other individuals; it is the yellow color that implicitly communicates this guilt in Folman's testimony. The use of colors in *Waltz with Bashir* consequently becomes a clear example of a purely visual testimony.

Folman's conversations with Sivan concerning his own role in the Sabra and Shatila massacre points to one final interesting aspect of the presence of the color yellow. Sivan links Folman's guilt from sending up the flares to him being, "Against your will, you were cast in the role of the Nazi."²⁰⁵ Previously, Sivan has also mentioned that, "For you, the significance of the massacre was set long before the actual event. It comes from a different massacre. It's about what happened in the other camps, those camps."²⁰⁶ Folman casts himself into the role of the perpetrator when he discovers his role during the Sabra and Shatila massacre; the yellow color that

²⁰⁴ Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 4.

²⁰⁵ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 107.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

permeates the frames of the last part of *Waltz with Bashir* can be seen as a visual link to the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear during WW2 by the Nazis.

The trauma and guilt associated with the Jewish yellow badges is extended onto Folman and his comrades through the yellow color in the panels; guilt they cannot get rid of, although they were not to blame for what occurred inside the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Interestingly, the memory of what happened in Sabra and Shatila is one of the crucial reasons why Folman initially does not remember anything. When some of these memories are re-acquired and represented in the graphic narrative, the yellow color communicates a guilt that will not let go – the yellow color of the panels and the yellow badges that Jews wore during the Holocaust link the atrocities committed by Nazi's onto Jews, to that of the Israeli army's lack of action when the Christian Philanthropists massacred Palestinian and Lebanese civilians. The guilt that has taken hold of Folman thus shows itself in the visual testimony of *Waltz with Bashir*, and although it was the Israeli government that failed the refugees in Sabra and Shatila – the soldier's memory of the atrocities prohibits him from rendering himself blameless.

The Broken Camera – Visual Defense Mechanism

The previously mentioned conversation that Folman and professor Solomon have about the RPG-attack introduces a visual representation that is interesting in relation to the end of *Waltz with Bashir*. Folman asks her how he could have no memory, no recollection of an RPG attack that he allegedly experienced with Frenkel. Solomon explains this phenomenon as a “dissociative event,”²⁰⁷ and explains that (as previously mentioned) people may attempt to put oneself outside a difficult situation in order to create a distance, a coping mechanism, to the gruesome reality rolling before one's eyes. Solomon goes on to tell Folman about a young photographer who used a fictive camera as a lens in order to filter all the horrible things he saw during the Lebanon war. “He kept thinking he was seeing it through the lens of an imaginary camera. . . . Until something happened and it was as if his camera had broken.”²⁰⁸ The graphic narrative presents several examples of drawn photographs from the war; some of the photographs bleed off the page, while others hang slanted and unorganized on the page. Memories are presented as still, unorganized, chaotic moments, creating a distance that is not assignable to any real memory. Similarly, the animated film is also able to reproduce

²⁰⁷ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 58.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 58-59.

the single-frame camera shots that the graphic narrative produces more naturally. The shots from the young man's imaginary camera are shown as single frame photographs, until the camera breaks, and the viewer sees a blurring, shaking camera as it corrects itself and stabilizes into a continuous stream of narrated, visualized sequence once more. The single-frame camera shots are shown as uncharacteristic; when the shaking camera stabilizes, real memory is returned to. Interestingly, this is an inverted presentation of how memory really works; memory is not a stream of images played in sequence, usually, memory is recollected through single images. As Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image."²⁰⁹



Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 59.

Consequently, the single frame presentation of the young photographer's use of an imaginary camera (both in the graphic narrative and in the animated film) is more characteristic to the way memory works, than the normal sequential presentation in the two mediums. The emphasis on the dissociative event must therefore be placed on the *presentation* of how the photographer's imaginary camera breaks with the narrative flow; the way memory is presented, not the way memory works.

This break with the narrative flow reoccurs in a different form later in the narrative of *Waltz with Bashir*, however, first it seems vital to discuss how the graphic narrative entwines Solomon's narrative of the young photographer into a part of Folman's journey for memories; a conversation that underlines the collaborative aspect

²⁰⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 22.

of Folman's testimony. The photographer's camera breaks down when he comes to the hippodrome in Beirut and finds all the Arabian horses slaughtered:

"War is bad enough, the things people do to each other", he told me, "but what had these lovely horses done, what sin had they committed, that they had to suffer this way?" The pile of horses was too much for him to bear. The mechanism he'd used to protect himself, to keep him out of the frame, as if he were watching a film but not participating in it, failed him.²¹⁰

The first panel on page 61 then shows a close-up of a dying horse's eye, flies swarming around it, with the young boy's shape represented in the blank, reflective surface of the horse's pupil. "He had been pulled into the picture, and then he lost his mind."²¹¹ By extension, Solomon suggests that Folman has experienced something similar during especially traumatic and stressful situations in the Lebanon war (such as the RPG attack and the massacre at Sabra and Shatila).

Furthermore, it seems that Solomon's presentation of the young boy's lens may have been influential to the ending of *Waltz with Bashir*. Similarly to how the young boy's lens breaks down at the sight of the dying Arabian horses at the hippodrome, so does the graphical representation of Folman's witnessing of the atrocities that happened at Sabra and Shatila. Folman's final recollection of the massacre at the end of the graphic narrative thus employs a drastic shift in the visual representation of the events; the panels shift from the animated sequential structure to a sudden use of real life photographs. The photographs shown in the graphic narrative represent Folman's realization of what he had seen, and what he had put himself outside of. The change from animation to real life footage illustrates the realization of Folman's lost memories; simultaneously it represents the broken lens that can no longer contain the graphic narrative, the reality of the realization destroys the applied distance that the animated narrative provides.

The two last pages of *Waltz with Bashir* (which are silent pages, no frame-narrator, no explanation) communicate a testimony, a visualization of a gruesome discovery, a reality that Folman previously had protected himself from. Sontag claims in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "once the camera was emancipated from the tripod, truly portable, . . . picture-taking acquired an immediacy and authority greater than any

²¹⁰ Folman and Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir*, 60.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

verbal account in conveying the horror of mass-producing death.”²¹² Folman seems to be in agreement with this statement; by not saying, or writing anything (the animated film only uses the sounds from the actual filming, which mainly presents the cries of grieving women) he underlines the power photography has of conveying horror. This does not only include the horror of the massacre, but also the horror of Folman’s comprehension of his own role in it. In order to communicate this devastating realization, Folman does not shy away from using yet another external source to communicate his testimony; the collaborative nature of his testimony reaches its final resolution as photographs by Robin Moyer²¹³ (film from news reporters in the animated film) are used to convey what seems to be too painful to be communicated in any other manner. Folman’s silence at the very end of *Waltz with Bashir* is summed up, in another context, by Sontag: “In contrast to a written account—which, depending on its complexity of thought, reference, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership—a photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all.”²¹⁴ What is essential about this statement, in relation to Folman’s testimony, is the message Folman attempts to communicate to the reader/viewer. When Deborah Solomon, in an interview with Folman, said that, “The film can be described as the Israeli ‘Slaughterhouse-five,’” Folman replied, “Yes, more than anything else, I see it as an antiwar movie.”²¹⁵ Photographs are a universal language; they can communicate Folman’s personal memories, his personal testimony, while simultaneously communicating the meaninglessness of war and the reality of it all; the photographs, more than any animation, or text can ever do, state, “Everything that you saw was real, everything that you saw happened.”²¹⁶

The multiple frame-narrators, the team of graphic artists, the interviews with war veterans, a professor, a news reporter, and the use of photographs and real life footage are all examples of how Folman has used a vast array of different resources in order to portray and communicate his testimony from the Lebanon war. This, in turn, points to the collaborative aspect of the graphic narrative. For while *Waltz with Bashir* ultimately

²¹² Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 24.

²¹³ Her full portfolio of pictures taken from Lebanon 1982 can be seen on her webpage: Robin Moyer, “Asia Based Photojournalist,” accessed: February 24, 2012. <http://www.robinmoyer.com/gallery.html?gallery=Lebanon%201982&folio=Portfolio>.

²¹⁴ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 20.

²¹⁵ Solomon, “The Peacemaker.”

²¹⁶ Raymond Jeong, “A Waltz with Yoni Goodman: An Interview with an Animation Director,” *Stanford Graphic Non-Fiction 2011* (blog), entry posted on December 19, 2011, accessed February 23, 2012. <http://stanfordgraphicnonfiction.blogspot.com/2011/12/waltz-with-yni-goodman-interview-with.html>.

follows Folman's journey to regain his lost memories, it also presents other people's testimonies along the way. Folman's access to his repressed memories is obtained through these other testimonies and conversations, and consequently, it seems clear that he only reaches his testimonial conclusion (his repressed memories) through communication. The collective memory of his fellow Israeli comrades is employed in order to arrive at a collaborative memory – a testimony to how these comrades collectively attest and remember the first Lebanon war.

Folman's conversations with other witnesses and with a psychologist clearly are therapeutic - therapeutic in the sense that it allows him to address his previously unattainable memories, and understand why he has forgotten them. Folman's trauma-related guilt (this phenomenon is clearly manifested in Vladek and Artie in *Maus* as well), which appeared after he discovered what the flares he and his comrades sent up helped do, is shown explicitly as a sickly yellow color that pervades both his hallucinations and the last part of the graphic narrative. This visualization of guilt is not only presented as his personal guilt, but moreover as a collective guilt that is clearly found in the two other witnesses from the Sabra and Shatila massacre – the narrative, although primarily focused on Folman's testimony, also addresses a collective guilt, indicating the collaborative nature of *Waltz with Bashir* as a testimonial narrative.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have studied the communication of testimony in the three graphic narratives of *Maus*, *Fun Home* and *Waltz with Bashir*. My aim has been to show in what particular manner testimony is communicated in the respective works. This has led to an in-depth analysis of concepts such as: postmemory, closure and collaborative testimony and their connection to the act of giving testimony in the graphic narratives. This has furthermore allowed me to pinpoint some of the most interesting places in the graphic narratives where the communication of testimony happens on a bi-modal plain. The graphic memoirs are at their most complex and interesting when the visual and the textual elements of the memoirs cooperatively testify to traumatic incidents and experiences. This interaction is of course completely natural in the graphic narrative format; however, as testimony in literature has usually been given in a monomodal communicative manner, the graphic testimonies bring something new to the table. This bi-modal communication allows topics and issues that may be too complicated and challenging to establish and represent in only words *or* images to come forth.

When one of the communicative models breaks down, either the visual or the textual, the other one can step in and allow the witness to continue giving testimony. Furthermore, the drawing and act of composing the narrative into a whole (despite how fragmentary it may seem) allows the artist to more forcefully represent traumatic memories. As Judith Herman has stated, “In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story.”²¹⁷ The combination of visual and textual representation forces the artist to approach the memories from different perspectives; this suggests a working-through that is helpful for the artist's further curative process in relation to the traumatic memories.

The close relationship between the reader and the graphic narrative, as discussed by Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics*, seems to suggest that a reader of a graphic narrative is more of “a *silent accomplice*,” an “*equal partner in crime*,”²¹⁸ than what is the case with a reader of a novel. If one transfers this to theory on testimony and the relationship between the listener and the witness, it would imply that a graphic narrative is more suitable for communicating trauma, and as a tool of giving testimony, than a purely textual testimony. My close-reading of the three graphic memoirs in question,

²¹⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 174.

²¹⁸ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 68.

have, at least, revealed a number of different representational tools used that would be difficult to recreate in any other medium. This does not necessarily validate the graphic medium as particularly fitting for communicating testimony; it does, however, suggest it. Furthermore, it shows how the individual artist feels that is appropriate to give testimony; this individuality is one of the other key notions for giving testimony.

Dominick LaCapra notes in *History and its Limits* that, “testimony may come in many forms, for example the essay, the poem, the joke, the song, and dance as well as less conventional forms of narrative.”²¹⁹ This is not only a good point as to the origin of graphic narratives as a way of giving testimony, it also poignantly addresses why the three graphic memoirs discussed in this thesis approach testimony in such different ways. As presented, the memoirs do have some representational and topical elements in common, however, for the most part, the narratives become interesting as testimonials precisely because of their individuality. This individuality is, furthermore, almost a prerequisite for the testimony to take place. Personal narratives on trauma issues come from an internal need to communicate; this need is vested in something personal that may or may not have a link to larger cultural issues. This is also why certain narrative traits and concepts become predominate in each of the graphic memoirs; these are the artists’ way of communicating their trauma, of giving testimony.

My principle argument in the chapter on *Maus* follows Hirsch’s argument regarding postmemory as being the premise for Spiegelman’s narrative; had it not been for his need to present his parents’ past and work through the way in which their history transmits intergenerationally to him, the graphic memoir of *Maus* would never have been created. The prologue of *Maus* and “Prisoner on the Hell Planet: a Case Study,” are some of the more prominent examples of how the Holocaust affected both Vladek and Anja long after WW2 was over. In turn, these narrative sequences also communicate how the Holocaust belatedly influenced Artie. The visual representation of postmemory that is evident throughout *Maus* allows Spiegelman to attest to his traumatic experiences in a uniquely visual manner. “Hell Planet” is used as my chief argument for this fact; the personal testimonial Spiegelman produced after Anja’s death is seamlessly interwoven in the narrative, allowing postmemory to be emphasized through its strong resonance in the visual sphere of the testimony-within-a-testimony. This resonance also happens throughout the entire narrative of *Maus*; the reappearing

²¹⁹ LaCapra, *History and its Limits*, 76.

shadow of postmemory becomes a testimony in itself of why Spiegelman cannot remain silent. *A Survivor's Tale* illustrates how the intergenerational issues of postmemory can be dealt with, worked through, while simultaneously also addressing how it will continue to haunt Spiegelman for the rest of his life.

The discussion of testimony in *Fun Home* focuses extensively on the concept of closure in comics. Closure appears in any comics narrative, however, it is my argument that closure is used considerably by Bechdel throughout *Fun Home* for a specific reason: to engage the reader, and in turn, to allow the reader to become an invested, listener, of testimony. *Fun Home* does not only have an untraditional use of panel transitions, with a heavy reliance on S2S transitions, the graphic memoir is also filled with intertextual references. These references further enhance what the emotionally distanced frame-narrator in *Fun Home* is doing – forcing the reader to commit much closure in relation to the narrative of the graphic memoir, in order for meaning to emerge. Bechdel uses closure both to describe and to reproduce the traumatic environment that was the Bechdel home, and more specifically the difficult relationship that she had to her father, Bruce Bechdel. In fact, the dynamics of this relationship are arguably communicated most forcefully in the relation between the visual and the textual of the narrative. An example of this can be found on the last page of the narrative, additionally, this panel also presents the extent of how far the curative process of Bechdel's narrative can go: the frame-narrator notes that Bruce, “in the tricky reverse narrative that impels our entwined stories, . . . was there to catch me when I leapt,”²²⁰ while the visual depiction shows Alison in mid-air, floating in the limbo between the spring board of the swimming pool and the arms of her father. This suggests an attempt to communicate a curative ending, however simultaneously an inability to do just so; the interplay between the textual and the visual rendering of this panel also represents how all this can only be achieved through a reader that is able to navigate and understand this particular closed narration.

Ari Folman uses the act of giving testimony to reach a remembrance of his role during the first Lebanon war. This is achieved through interaction with fellow comrades from the war, and an expert on combat trauma. When the reader furthermore learns that Folman did not create the visual aspects of *Waltz with Bashir*, it seems clear that a large amount of the narrative in *Waltz with Bashir* is presented through a collaborative effort.

²²⁰ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 232.

This leads to what I have chosen to call a “collaborative testimony”. Folman actively seeks out fellow war veterans’ testimonials in order to be able to represent his own – this collaborativeness is consequently linked to the concept of collective memory. The collaborative testimony is reached through a mutual remembrance from the first Lebanon war; a remembrance connected to a larger, cultural memory that the comrades from the war seem to share. This collaborativeness manifests itself in certain parts of *Waltz with Bashir* as factual recollections, while others are represented as more factical. This representation of factual vs. factical memories is communicated on a visual level – the color scheme of the different scenes allude to the extent of which a specific representation is a flashback, a recollection a dream or a hallucination. This allows Folman to anchor the graphic narrative in a subtle, however yet persuasive, communication of truthfulness – addressing how traumatic recollection works, how evasive and unstable traumatic memory can be, and how Folman himself feels that it is most appropriately represented.

All of the three graphic narratives employ a rich layer of graphical details in order to communicate trauma; in *Maus*, Spiegelman leaves subtle graphical traces of how the past is interchangeably present in the present; Bechdel uses book titles and glimpses of shadowy silhouettes to convey memories deeply associated with trauma; Folman and Polonsky employ a distinct use of color and small details that suggest a plastic rendering of factual and factical memories. While their visual techniques and presentations vary, they all use distinctly graphical tools in order to testify to certain traumatic experiences of the past.

Bechdel’s testimony relies heavily on the textual elements of the narrative; this, as I have argued, has to do with the fact that literature and language were and are such vital parts of Bechdel’s identity. It would be unnatural for her to address her traumatic experiences in any other manner. Spiegelman also employs a substantial amount of writing into his testimony; this is due to the fact that when he recreates his father’s testimony he feels that Vladek’s voice should be present in the narrative. A look through *Maus* reveals that the boxes that contain Vladek’s voice inside the panels of *his* story are rarely used in Art’s present-day narrative. This points to a need for textual as well as visual descriptions in the parts of *Maus* that contain Vladek’s testimony. It prohibits Art from allowing the graphical aspects of the narrative to “speak for themselves,” for the most part. Folman’s testimony in *Waltz with Bashir* is by far the narrative out of the three with least writing; this fact is somewhat strange given that

Folman only wrote the narrative, and only the parts of the narrative that he himself is a part of, while Polonsky and his team did all the drawing. Obviously Folman was a huge part of the graphical presentation in *Waltz with Bashir* but it is interesting that such a large part of his testimony is vested in purely visual representation, given the artistic production history of the animated film and the later graphic memoir. This does, however, only emphasize the collaborative aspect of the narrative.

Maus, *Fun Home* and *Waltz with Bashir* all have a similar understanding of how truth should be dealt with in a graphic memoir. This does not mean that they approach the theme of truth similarly, however. Spiegelman addresses issues pertaining to truth from the very first page through the anthropomorphic metaphor, and although he clearly attempts to be faithful and truthful to “how it really was,” he knows, as the reader also does, that most of what is represented can never be verified. Bechdel attempts, perhaps more forcefully, to represent *the* truth in her testimony. Although, conditioned by how memories are remembered, especially traumatic memories, and how “All I could speak for was my own perceptions, and perhaps not even those,”²²¹ she creates a chaotic narrative that implicitly shows an awareness of the fact that dealing with traumatic experiences is not a recreation, but a working-through of memories that have not been processed chronologically in the mind. Folman’s clear dissociated state in relation to what happened to him during the first Lebanon war, rendered as a strong PTSD reaction, “forces” the narrative to question what are factual and what are factical memories. This is solved through a close interaction with other witnesses from the war.

Comics, has been, and is, neglected by most people as a serious art form due to an unintentional ignorance of what the medium has to offer. I strongly believe that if readers were given the opportunity to read narratives such as *Maus*, *Fun Home*, *Waltz with Bashir*, or for that matter, *Watchmen*, they would discover the potential this medium has for telling stories in new and interesting ways. Graphic memoirs and autographics²²² are often mentioned as examples of the serious and good parts of the comics medium, and although this has validity in relation to the number of excellent works written within these genres, it should be emphasized that the quality of graphic narratives reaches beyond these small sub-genres within the comics medium. An interesting aspect of the growing validity of autographics is that it may be a way of legitimizing the medium of comics on a larger scale. Once readers become aware of the

²²¹ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 141.

²²² Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*, 187.

possibilities that the medium possesses in relation to presenting trauma, testimony and life-writing, they may move on to see its more general potential for producing thematically and structurally interesting narratives.

The addressing of the dual outlet of communication that graphic narratives allow, give intergenerational trauma victims, PTSD-victims and other people affected by trauma a unique medium to work through what has been experienced. I hope that my thesis can help to establish the numerous possibilities that graphic narratives have for communicating trauma.

When words and images combine they can, at best, tell a more complete story than one of the two in isolation. When the frame-narrator in *Fun Home* says, “What’s lost in translation is the complexity of loss itself,”²²³ she addresses something essential about the entire process of reading testimonial narratives. Reading is a process similar to that of translating; a reader will interpret the words and the images presented in a text and translate these into a meaningful whole. However, as translation, or reading is performed, some parts of the meaning will be lost. The photographs Bechdel presents on page 120 in *Fun Home* attempts to translate her father’s pain onto herself: “The exterior setting, the pained grin, the flexible wrists, even the angle of shadow falling across our faces—it’s about as close as a translation can get.”²²⁴ In all of this the reader sees two hands holding the two photographs up. The idea of “multiple hands” draws the reader into the narrative, and consequently helps to translate the “complexity of loss,” that the frame-narrator is attempting to inhabit *within* the narrative. The presence of the hands inside the panels on page 120 invites the reader into *Fun Home*, and, in turn, to be a listener of testimony.

²²³ Bechdel, *Fun Home*, 120.

²²⁴ Ibid.

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